

THE  
HEADQUARTER  
RECRUIT

RICHARD DEHAN



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Uniform with this Volume*

# THE DOP DOCTOR

## SOME PRESS OPINIONS

"Mr. Dehan is splendidly individual, and he has fashioned a big book with a dignity, an earnestness, far-ranging knowledge, and a high spiritual beauty which call for enthusiastic praise."—*Liverpool Courier*.

"Its background—a town besieged in the South African War—is excellently rendered. Mr. Dehan has noticed everything and felt everything. . . . As a picture of a siege it has scarcely any rival. . . . He is absorbing—that is the only word to use for this strange book."—*Standard*.

"His plot is strong, his incidents are innumerable but not too crowded, his characters for the most part live, his South Africa, and more especially the siege, is often magnificently done. . . . It has enough character, enough picturesqueness, enough real sentiment and humanity to carry the writer straight up to the top."—*St. James's Gazette*.

"He has given us with unflagging enthusiasm and often with astonishing power a huge slice of human life, chaotic, formless, sombre, complex as life is. It is impossible to do more than hint at the many poignant scenes. Mr. Dehan can grasp and handle and penetrate human passion more surely than most writers of our day. Balzac is the parallel to Mr. Dehan in scope and standpoint, in lavishness and ruthlessness. That is why criticism can best summarise 'The Dop Doctor' as a big rugged slice of life placed boldly and unremittingly before us by a man powerfully competent to the task."—*Daily Mail*.

"It is a warm-hearted, generous, over-lavish book. His opening scene has real beauty and pathos, and his detailed story of a great siege constitutes a really fine background."—*Times*.

"A great novel. The author has written a fine and moving tale, wide in its range, deep in its sympathies, full of the pain and the suffering, the courage and the truth of life."—*Observer*.

"What a story it is! . . . Mr. Dehan has given in 'The Dop Doctor' of the most striking and the most impressive in fiction. He has, without doubt, written one of the books of the year—one that every man and woman will be reading."—*T. P.'s Weekly*.

"It is a very notable and even a great work. Mr. Dehan has the passion and the fire in which modern fiction is wanting. He has wide horizons. He can find room for great thoughts and ideas; he uses kindling names, and he maintains his fervour at a high pitch through all his many pages. . . . It is an achievement of which any living author might be proud."—*British Weekly*.

"There are many moments of intense dramatic force. I doubt if there has ever been a novel which so vividly gave the impression of a real state of war. . . . There is a great variety of characters, all of them are vividly realisable. . . . There is an energy, a fulness of spirit, a perceptiveness, a responsiveness to both lighter moods and blinding passions, a sense of great issues, which give it a quality no less significant than rare."—*Daily News*.

"To the real novel-reader, who likes to spend many long evenings over a story which he is ultimately sorry to have finished, we most heartily prescribe Mr. Dehan's sustaining volume. . . . At once Mr. Dehan grips us."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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# BETWEEN TWO THIEVES

## SOME PRESS OPINIONS

"One thing at any rate is certain. If 'Between Two Thieves' does not catch the popular favour as completely as 'The Dop Doctor,' it will be the fickle humour of the public that is to blame, and not the sincerity or workmanship of the author. Moves consistently to a far-seen goal the indomitable sincerity of outlook and workmanship which stamped 'The Dop Doctor' as one of the most honest literary productions of our time. The same stern determination to strip life of its illusions, to reveal the cruelty and deception which underlie popular success, to condone human failure and condemn inhuman triumphs—in a word, the same singleness of eye and heart make of this new book a living picture, intensely touching, deeply suggestive, and impeccably true. Here, we feel, is the heart of life, torn from the body of the age, quivering, palpitating. The sight of it may shock the senses, but it would be mere cowardice to deny its appeal."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"It is not merely as a novel, as a tale that is told, that one regards such a book as this. It is rather as an epitome of its time, an enkindling record of the courage and self-sacrifice, the confusion, abuses, the horrors and sufferings summed up in the word Crimea. The book lives; it burns with enthusiasm; it is based on a wide and penetrating knowledge of life and of humanity. There are moments when the sheer intensity of the writing, its imaginative vision, produce an effect little short of that of genius. We go out of one roaring world into another. And such a book will capture its thousands of readers—little likely to pay much attention to a criticism bent only on discovering the defects of its generous qualities."—*Westminster Gazette*.

"The interest is great throughout and cumulative to the end."—*Times*.

"This huge panoramic and kaleidoscopic romance of France and England from 1820 to 1855, with the epilogue bringing the life-story of two of the principal characters down to the present day, illustrates in striking fashion the development to modern fiction in its relation to history. His new novel has exuberance, eloquence, and passion."—*Spectator*.

"Everyone will have to read 'Between Two Thieves,' the new and notable novel from the pen of Richard Dehan, author of 'The Dop Doctor.' However exuberant, it is always picturesque, and there are many pages of such enthralling interest that time is forgotten in the perusal. In these latter pages we have a thrilling and unforgettable picture of the horrors of the Crimean War; and the author exposes with mordant power the appalling scandals of the British Transport and Commissariat Departments for which the campaign was so notorious. Handled with all the licence and imagination of the born romancist."—*Graphic*.

"The book is written in an ecstasy, a passion, a fury. Knowledge, energy, sincerity, enthusiasm. This book is a remarkable testimony to the energy, sincerity, and enthusiasm of Mr. Dehan. It will undoubtedly command its audience, and will leave a large number of people with a vivid, although somewhat partial, picture of an interesting period of history."—*Standard*.

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# The Headquarter Recruit

And Other Stories

By  
Richard Dehan

Author of "The Dop Doctor," "Between Two Thieves"



London  
William Heinemann

1913

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TO

SIR GEORGE LEWIS, BART.

"Poor thanks for the rich kindness ;  
The liberal loan of wit, and season'd knowledge,  
Which I cannot forget, Sir, nor would ever. . . ."

BEN JONSON.



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*The majority of these stories have previously appeared  
in "The World" and similar well-known periodicals.  
Others are now published for the first time.*

R. D.

June 7, 1913.

# I

## THE HEADQUARTER RECRUIT

WHEN a new, pink, callow subaltern, fresh from Sandhurst, certified to be in good mental and bodily condition, and free from any physical defect likely to interfere with the efficient performance of military duty—I quote from the Government Regulations — when such a one joins the Dapple Greys, and has been thoroughly packed with other things necessary to know ; when he has acquired the Dapple Grey seat and the Dapple Grey hand ; when he has learned the Dapple Grey method of wearing a uniform, carrying the Colours, and knotting a necktie ; when the history of the regiment, its achievements, traditions, follies, maxims, and jealousies, shall have soaked through his eyes and ears into the brain, blood, and nerves of his body ; when the Adjutant looks upon him as properly salted, and he has been weighed and not found wanting in the scales of the rank and file—then he will be very sure to hear—never from the mouth of the Chief himself, unless he be proved pure gold in the furnace and worthy of the highest honour—the Tale of the Head-quarter Recruit.

The tale is usually recounted after mess, in a quiet cushiony corner of the smoking-room, when the air is dusky with the fragrant vapours of Havana or Yenidje, and the light-footed, snowily-clad Hindu mess-boys, who count among the little pet extravagances of the regiment, trip to and fro with drinks, coughing in a subdued, sick-monkey-like way—for the climate of our beloved island

is hard upon what they have learned to call their chests. But it is best to gather it as it drops, once in a blue moon, sentence by sentence, from under the great white moustache of the Chief, when Lady Lucy has gathered her priceless old laces about her still beautiful shoulders, and passed out of the dining-room with a kind, smiling glance of her sapphire-blue eyes for the blushing and beatified boy who opens the door, and hears his spurs click together as he makes his bow. . . .

"A glass of port with you. . . . When you marry," says Sir Alured, who will have observed, not without mental complacency, the admiration in the boy's eyes—"when you marry—and dee'd bad policy to do that before you're thirty-five, take the word from me!—marry a tall woman. Little women degenerate into dumps, the middle height becomes insignificant when the *premyare jooness* is past, and the rosebud, by George! that was all dew and perfume, and that sort of thing, you know, don't you know? is a rose full-blown. But height, with breeding, for me; and a blonde for choice. Hardly a grey hair in My Lady's head to-day, and all those coils her own; while as for the colour—that's not the kind of gold they give you in change for a bank-note of fifty *frongs* in the *Palay Royal*."

Sir Alured will pause to extract a cigar of portentous size and strength from the receptacle that resembles a week-end suit case, and the boy usually says, blushing to the eyes :

"I—I think, sir, that Lady Lucy is the most beautiful woman I ever s-saw in my life, whatever her age was."

"Another glass of port!" The Chief fills bumpers for both. "We'll drink My Lady's health. Old-fashioned custom, but we're both old-fashioned folks, by George! And light up! You prefer cigarettes, dee'd filthy things! but all young fellows smoke 'em now." The hazel, hawk-eyes of the Chief now shine with a softened light. The

fold between his heavy black eyebrows will relax, the wise little puckers at the temples will smooth themselves out, leaving their indications charted in white upon the crisp and sun-browned skin. "A beautiful woman," repeats Sir Alured. "I've heard that said fairly often, you know, don't you know? in twenty-five years. But you ought to have seen My Lady at eighteen!"

And from this beginning results, if circumstances be favourable and the little gods propitious, the story of the Headquarter Recruit.

"It was in 1885—durin' the squabble between England and Russia respectin' the Zulfikar Pass—and things looked promisin' for Active Service." Sir Alured clears his throat, and tugs at the huge white moustache with a gaunt brown hand, on the little finger of which a great Indian emerald, square-shaped, graven with the crest of the regiment, and given to its colonel by the prince of a feudatory native State, gleams like the eye of some ambushed beast of prey. "Dufferin was Viceroy, and there was a cloud no bigger than a what-d'y-call-it on the Eastern horizon that meant trouble. And here at the *dépôt*—and Studminster, in those days, was even more confoundedly dee'd dull than Studminster is to-day—you may take it that we were lookin' for the dance to begin. The Chief, Leathdonald, was as nervous as a hen on hot bricks, jumped at the sight of a telegram like an orderly sergeant at the sound of the quartermaster's bugle, and we were as hard as nails, you know, don't you know, and as fit as fiddles. 'Both officers and men highly efficient, and pantin' to distinguish themselves upon the bloody field,' as the *Studminster Gazette* put it. The then editor was the father of the infernal ass who does the paper now, and very like him. . . . Of course, at this and all the other *dépôts* recruitin' went on briskly. The system of enlistin'

men by brigades instead of battalions was just started, and the confusion was somethin' to remember. . . . Suggested the Day of Judgment, you know, don't you know? with thousands of lost souls shriekin' for their brigade-numbers from every quarter of the compass, and squads upon squads doin' drill in their ordinary clothes, because until the numbers were assigned they couldn't get their kits. Haw!"

The Chief knocks the ash tenderly from his cigar, and goes on: "Bein' a junior Captain, and actin' as Adjutant vice Holroyd—'Cricky' Holroyd, a man whose eyelashes the women used to rave about and who'd sustained Boodle's fracture of the patella in a regimental football match, and was on the sick list in consequence—I hadn't much time for playin' crokay, as you may guess. But now and then I got a day or two's leave, and I generally put in my time at Studminster Towers. The Duke was a charmin' old man, regular type of the old English gentleman, y'know, don't you know? and the Duchess was one of the finest women—barring my wife!—I ever set eyes on. She was my mother's dearest friend, and it was at her house in town that I'd left my first card with the Sandhurst College address, after I'd passed in from Eton. And a dee'd conceited young puppy I was that day, I don't mind telling you. The Duchess made me free of her drawin'-room, and was confoundedly kind—for my own sake, she was good enough to say, as well as my mother's, who thought the world of her. '*Let Horatia form your taste, my dearest boy,*' she said to me over and over again, '*and you cannot possibly go wrong.*'"

Sir Alured pauses to sip at his tawny port with a lurking twinkle in the corner of his eye.

"Of course, I fell in love with her, you know, don't you know?" he resumes, "and the Duke was awfully pleased—said it showed my spirit, and it was what he'd

done himself when he was a young man. Regular old *proo cheavallyay*, the Duke, and the Duchess was as clever as she was handsome, by Jove ! and kept me on the curb with' a light hand, while allowin' me to feteh and carry, and dance attendance on her in that way women like in a boy and despise in a man, you know, don't you know ? And she was my first love, and I enjoyed bein' miserable about her and keepin' a glove of hers I'd boned when she wasn't lookin', in my letter-ease. . . . But her thumb on her bedroom candlestick at the bottom of the grand staircase—there were candlesticks in those days—was the Rubicon, as far as kissin' went, you may take my word !

" Of course, the Duchess's girls—Lady Agatha and Lady Loosay—were children in those puppy days of mine—two schoolroom fillies with long arms and legs, and long tails of yellow hair ; and the heir the Marquis of Courtheron, now Duke of Studminster, was a pretty, fair-haired little beggar, lookin' in his velvet and point lace and fal-lals like a lady's page out of a mediæval novel. You ought to have heard that young shaver swear, sir, in the stable-yards. . . . A London cabby 'd have hung his head before that boy ; and as for Juxon, Troop C—you know the brute I mean, a V.C. man, and the foulest-mouthed blackguard unhung—pit him against that boy, he couldn't eurse worth a dee—it's my firm belief ! Haw,hum !"

Sir Alured would clear his throat sonorously.

" Dear !" Lady Lucy might say, looking in from the drawing-room, " the coffee is getting cold."

" Callow wants to smoke another cigarette. Ten minutes' græee, Loosay, and we're with you." And as Lady Lucy's slim jewelled hand let fall the portiere, the Chief would go on : " All that—about my bein' so tremendously gone on the Duchess, was buried under the accumulated love-affairs of years. But when they knew that I was in the neighbourhood the Duke sent a mounted groom

over to the Barracks to ask me to dine and sleep, and for old sake's sake, you know, don't you know ? I was delighted to accept. The Duke, though crippled with hereditary gout (it took the fine old fellow below the belt before the year was over), the Duke was charmed to see me, and the Duchess was nearly as handsome as ever ; the regular woman of the world, you know, don't you know ? with a house full of people, includin' Royalty, to entertain ; and the welcomin' hand and the *mo hooroo* for everyone. And Courtheron twenty-one, and goin' out to India with the Bay Hussars. And the girls, Lady Agatha and Lady Loosay—twenty and eighteen. And if you had seen Lady Loosay as she was then——”

“ Alured,” would say the crystal-clear voice of Lady Lucy from the drawing-room, “ Mr. Callow must have finished his cigarette. I believe it is you who are delaying. And the Doctor does not approve of your drinking port. He said so only last Thursday.”

“ Extraordinary memory you have, Loosay ! Well, as I was saying, if you had seen her——”

“ My dear, I *cannot* believe that anybody really eares in the least about those old stories.” There would be an imperative ring in the tone, and a little impatient rustle of silks would accompany it. And Callow, having heard whispers that the stern, unbending Colonel was, in the seclusion of his home, an obedient and submissive husband, would chuckle in his sleeve.

“ Really, Loosay ! . . . Oh, by the way, what's that noise upstairs ? Sounds like Agatha's baby cryin'.”

“ Are you quite sure ? Poor little dear, the nurse must have left it. I'll go up at once.” And Lady Lucy's silks would rustle anxiously away.

The Chief, his strategie movement crowned with success, would remark, looking gravely in the face of his guest :

“ I only said it sounded like, you know, don't you

know? But grandmothers are worse than mothers when it comes to baby-worshippin', and when My Lady has made quite sure it's asleep, and tucked it up to her satisfaction, and overhauled the bottle-department and inspected the night-light, she'll sit down by the crib and spend half an hour or so in tracin' family likenesses—in a lump of live putty. Women are queer creatures, bless 'em! But I was forgettin' the story. Where did I leave off?"

"Where you met the Duchess of Studminster again, I think, sir."

"Just so. It's a pretty couplet of that French poet-fellow's, but a lie on the face of it. We don't *revenong toojoor* to our *premyare amoar*. We're very glad to see her lookin' fit and in good condition after so many years; but when it comes to love-makin' we prefer to break fresh ground. And it's a far cry between eighteen and eight-and-twenty. And I was never a romantic sort, as you'll easily believe. But I don't mind telling you that the first sight of Lady Loosay standin' under the Moroni portrait that hangs over the Brescia fireplace in the great hall of the Castle, where they were all gathered for afternoon tea, left a record impression. At eighteen she was nearly as tall as she is now—and My Lady stands five foot nine in her stockings!—and as slim and straight as an assegai. And those gold hair-ropes of hers were redder, and she wore 'em hanging down her back in a plait as thick as the chain-cable of a man-o'-war. . . . By George!" Sir Alured's cigar will have gone out, but he does not seem to know it. "She looked me in the face as frankly as a good sort of schoolboy, and said that she remembered me coming to Berkeley Square when she was a little girl. . . . And I took her in to dinner that night, and she and Agatha gave us some singin' after dinner—all the Poyletts are musical—and Lady Loosay sang a ballad of the ecclesi-

astical-sentimental kind, about a little chorister with a snow-white surplice and a spotless soul, that kept ringin' in my head. . . . And my dreams were all white and blue and glowing gold, like her skin and eyes and hair. Next morning I had an idea that I wasn't really badly bitten, and that the impression would pass. But when I found myself burning letters and gloves and rubbish I'd cherished—as young fools do—and wishin' that I'd kept my soul as confoundedly clean as that chorister-chap's surplice, I knew it was a case ! Fact is, I was over head and spurs in love ; and the Duchess saw it, because she confided to me as a friend of the family that a Russian, Prince Doubrikoff, a relative of the Imperial Family and immensely wealthy, had met Loosay at the State Ball of the previous season—at which she'd made her *deboo*, by George ! and set all the heads wagging. And though her darling girl was so young, yet, as a mother, she approved of early marriages and hoped that no foolish flirtation, which, of course, would never come to anything, might blind her pet to the advantage of fulfilling her obvious duty, to *rongjay* herself as befitted her station and gratify the dearest wishes of her parents, you know, don't you know ? And the news came as a dee'd facer at the time, my boy ; but when I remembered that I was a third son, Captain in a Cavalry regiment, without prospects or expectations, and a beggarly eleven-hundred a year besides my pay, I said to myself that the old woman was in the right. And at the earliest opportunity I made my *congjay*. It hurt, I don't mind tellin' you, to go away without a word to—to *her*." The slender stem of the Chief's wineglass snapped as the strong brown fingers closed upon it with unconscious force. "Dee the thing, another of 'em gone !" said the Chief. "But '*it was my duty, and I did,*' as Gilbert says ; and that one word would have led to all the others. So I went back to the *dépôt*

and threw myself with ardour into the recruitin'. I astonished Leathdonald, I remember, when I drove a four-in-hand round the town on market day, harnessed to a brake resplendent with flutterin' ribbons, and half a dozen bandsmen playin' patriotic tunes. I hooked a goodly number of 'death or glorys' with that little dodge; and Donohoe—died of perforation, poor beggar, in Field Hospital, near Bloëmfontein, in 1900!—Donohoe was my recruitin' sergeant. He had a tongue dipped in Irish honey, and before the yokels knew it the shilling was fisted. Few of 'em knew that they could back out before being attested, and escape Service by payin' a pound 'smart' money. . . . They're wiser now, dee 'em! Trouble you for a light, and do have another of those paper things! Wine's with you. Thanks!"

The Chief would pour out another glass of port and absorb the wine slowly, a smile lurking under the huge white moustache.

"One morning in the orderly-room," he would go on, "when the Colonel was lookin' over the medical reports, there came a knock—Donohoe's knock, soundin' as though a bull-calf had butted the door. 'Discouragin', Gassiloe,' says the Chief, looking up from a list of malformations, chiefly toes and veins, you know, don't you know? 'Sixty-five per cent of these beasts will have to be rejected.' And he began to grind away on a pet subject of his—namely, the State breedin' of healthy and well-developed men for the Service. Frederick the Great had found the plan answer confoundedly well, and why the deuce shouldn't her Majesty Queen Victoria? And I said 'Yes!' and 'No!' until Leathdonald had got well into his stride, and then I gave in to thinkin' of Lady Loosay. She'd been uppermost in my mind that mornin' as I shaved, and that's a fact. . . . Usually I'd managed to pile a lot of other

things on the top of her. But all the morning I'd been haunted by a vision of her blue eyes. And when Donohoe butted at the door again I jumped as if I'd been stung, and shouted : 'Come in !'

"Donohoe put in his head. I saw at once that something was in the wind, for that Hibernian mug of his (he had an upper lip like a tent-flap and a nose like a mushroom) was twisted up in the oddest way, and his little pig's eyes twinkled like two oil-wicks in a stable-lantern.

"'Begging your pardon, sorr,' says he, 'and saving the Colonel's presence, I'd be glad if you'd spake a worrd wid me outside, av it's convanient.'

"So I went into the passage and shut the door. 'Say what you have to say, and don't stand there lookin' so dee'd mysterious,' I said to him, I remember. 'If it's a question of recruits, the Colonel's sick of your cripples !'

"'An' well he may be,' says Donohoe in that velvety, coaxing Limerick brogue. 'Sooner shall a man wid variegated veins or anklemoses'—that was his way of pronouncing ankylosis—'enter the eye av a camel than pass the medical examination when wance ould Gimlets'—that was the Doctor's nickname—'has bid him sthrip. But 'tis not a question av *recruitses*. 'Tis *a* recruity, Captain dear, I'll be makin' bould to lay before your private observation.'

"'Where did you pick him up ?' I asked."

"'He called on me in the coal-yard an' inthrojuiced himself,' says Donohoe, 'in the style av polite society.'

"'Oh, a gentleman, you mean ?' I said.

"'Troth and faix,' said Donohoe, wipin' off a grin with the back of his hand, 'I'll not go so far so to be sayin' that. But come and look at him, sorr, an' judge for yourself.'

"'Very well,' said I carelessly. 'Is he a good height ?'

"'Five foot ten in his brogues,' said Donohoe, 'an' a

skin like a lily. An' there's promise in the slim av him—but it's not the promise av muscle an' bone !'

" 'A bad hearing,' I said. ' And where is he ?' For we'd reached the doorway, and I saw nothing like a would-be recruit waiting in the barrack square. Donohoe's answer surprised me more than a bit.

" 'I've clapped him in your little office, Captain dear,' says the fellow, breathing hard and jerking his thumb towards the next block, 'an' turned the kay on him, for fear any eye would be clapped on him above your own.' And he held up a rusty iron key as big as a bed-winck.

" 'Donohoe,' I said, 'if your only sister has gone and got married again, I'll admit it's merely natural that you should have been drinking her health. But as she's taken six husbands, to my certain knowledge, since July last, as a near relative you ought to expostulate. As regards this recruit—you've locked him up in my office, which is a dee'd irregular thing to do, and might get you into trouble. But if the young beggar is set upon enlistin'—'

" 'Dead set he is !' said Donohoe. ' By the teeth an' the nails. 'Tis the Bay Hussars he has on the brain ; he knows they're ordered to the East, and goin' with them he'd be by hook or crook.'

" 'We'll keep him for the Dapple Greys,' said I, 'if there are the makings of a man in him.' And at that Donohoe began to cough and splutter, so that he had to stop and lean against a wall to recover breath.

" 'The makin's av a man in him ! Och ! och ! 'Tis a cowld I have on me chest, sorr !' he said, as he mopped his streaming eyes, 'that takes me by the windpipe in a while. . . . The makin's av a—— I'll go bail he has !' And when he'd pulled himself together and turned into the passage that led to the Adjutant's little ground-glass-faced office, I heard him muttering the words over and over as he clinked along before me. Then he unlocked the door of the office

and threw it open with a flourish, and I walked in. There was the new recruit standin' by the knee-hole table—a tall, fair-haired, slim lad, in a shabby tweed suit several sizes too large. He'd an old shooting-cap on, with the peak pulled well down over his eyes. But the eyes were Lady Loosay's !

" My heart gave a buck-jump, and my palate dried up. I couldn't frame a word, but Donohoe saved me. He stepped in behind me, shutting the door, and setting his broad shoulders against it as though by accident, you know, don't you know ? so that nobody outside could see over the upper line of grounding.

" 'Take off yer hat !' said Donohoe in the usual authoritative tone, as though he were speakin' to the ordinary yokel. And Lady Loosay snatched it off, blushing crimson to the temples. She'd never seen me out of mufti, you know, don't you know ? and probably hadn't recognized me at first. But she knew me now, by George ! And I could see her heart plunging under her shabby waistcoat, as badly as mine was under my uniform. I was in full parade-kit, you know, don't you know ? and she might have thought me a dazzlin' spectacle, but for havin' danced with uniforms at the State Ball. The Russian Princee of sorts I've spoken of was Colonel of the Ismailovski Guards, so the gilt was off the gingerbread. Shy as she was herself, I stood, by George ! ready at the wind of a wad to have turned and bolted, I verily believe. But Donohoe saved the situation.

" 'Sorr,' he said in that honeyed Limerick brogue of his, 'this is the young lad I spoke av that was seekin' to join a Cavalry regiment goin' out to Inja. Would you be plased to put him through his facin's in the usual way ?' He turned to Lady Loosay, and, to my horror, spoke to *her* in the usual way. ' Hould up your head, and spake when you're spoken to. And av you're afther givin'

any av your lip to the off'cer, the Lord have mercy on your bones when I get ye to myself outside !' said Donohoe.

"There was nothing but to go through with it. I took the office chair and ran over the questions. 'What is your name ?' I began, in a hoarse, unnatural bass.

"The answering sound of Lady Loosay's voice sent cold chills racin' down my spine. 'T-Thomas Atkins,' she answered faintly.

"'A good name for a sojer,' said Donohoe, 'av it's your own !'

"'Your parish ?' I went on, 'and county of birth ?'

"'I was born in the Riviera,' said Lady Loosay, fidgetin' with the end of her necktie, a spotted, bird's-eye thing that must have belonged to one of the Studminster stablemen. I went on :

"'What is your age ?'

"'Rising eighteen,' said she.

"'Your trade or calling ?'

"'I beg your pardon ! I'm afraid—I don't quite——'

"'No trade or calling,' I said, pretending to make a note.

"'A shebeen loafer,' commented Donohoe. 'Clane hands make dirty bread,' he'd added, before I could frown him down.

"'Are you apprentice ?' was the next question.

"'Oh, dear, no !' said Lady Loosay. She was cooler in the cheeks and had got her second wind, so to speak ; and I read in her face that she believed I didn't know her. I went on :

"'Are you married ?'

"'No !' she said, with a frown, 'and I don't——' She bit off the end of the sentence. 'Don't mean to be unless I choose,' said the quiver of her short upper lip.

Donohoe was down upon her like nails. "'Is there no poor gurrul ye have coaxed an' deludhered an' left to *the*—

marcy av' the parish wid a cock av your hat ? I'll go bail there is, by the look in the tail av your eye. . . . Have ye any family, licensed or unlicensed, depindent on ye ? Me sowl to a flay's that ye have, as many as there were hairs on the blade av the razor that shaved you. By the Black Joke av Killmallow ! if you shut your mutton fist at me, you suckin' prize-fighter, I'll *larn* you——'

" ' Confound you ! ' I gasped out, choking with rage. ' Confound you, Donohoe, hold your tongue ! '

" ' And 'tis little wondher av the Captain would lose his timper wid you,' Donohoe said coldly, with his rebukin' eye on the recruit, ' afther you givin' him the lip you have. Lave him to me, sorr,' he went on ; " lave me to dale wid him, the son av a dumplin'-fed day-labourer, borrun between a pair av charity blankets an' vaccinated from a parish calf——'

" ' I—I'll put you under arrest,' I gasped, ' if you open your mouth again.'

" ' You hear ! ' said Donohoe warningly, ignoring me. ' You hear the Captain ! Behave, then, an' answer the interrigations av the off'cer with dacency an' thruth. Can ye ride ?'

" ' Anything ! ' said Lady Loosay, with a flash of the eyes.

" ' A horse,' went on Donohoe (I believed the man possessed) ' or a cow ? Can ye fence, swim, box, shoot, an' take the high lep standin' on your head ?'

" ' I can fence and swim,' said Lady Loosay pluckily— ' and use the gloves,' she added as an afterthought. . . . ' Court, my brother, used to say '—and she gulped a little — ' that I hit as straight as any fellow he knew. ! '

" ' Have ye serrved in the Militia, Arrmy, or Police ?' went on Donohoe. ' Have ye ever been rejicted as onfit for Service an' marked wid " D " or " B.C. " ? Will ye enlist for a short six wid the Colours an' anodher half-~~garen~~ in the Reserve, or take the alternative av twelve

years sthright on ind ? Will ye serve for twelve months exthra if abroad, or jurin' a war when your regular time is up ? Will ye lave the Reserve if called on to jine any brigade av Cavalry in imminint national danger or odher immergeency ? Will ye ondhertake to count white dots on black paper across the long length av the Hospital Examination Department, both eyes bein' covered wid a handkerchief ? Will ye learrn to tell the front av your face from the back av your head, distinguish your left leg wid the hay-band on it from your right wid the wisp av sthraw, an' advance three steps backwards an' dhress by the gutther ? Will ye patronize the Recreation Room an' kape out av the Canteen, or march to blackhole in forma-  
tion av wan, wid a skinful av malt an' a fiery eye, an' pay for your dhrinks as a man pays, wid exthra guard an' punishment-dhrill in the mornin' ? Ye will ? Then, in the name av Mary Kelly ! come wid me before the Docthor.' Donohoe swung about, opened the door and pointed to the passage. ' And when he bids ye sthrip to the hide,' he roared, ' sthrip ! an' if he ordhers ye to take that off too —do it av you're able ! ' "

" I grew red and jumped up, knockin' over the chair. I've an idea that I meant to kill Donohoe. But, by George ! I saw in a flash that the Sergeant had planned to break down the girl's guard, and that he'd done it—in the only way possible. Lady Loosay gave a little cry, and went white and red and red and white—four changes to the second. And her hands quivered out to me in an entreatin way that was all a woman's own. . . .

" ' She's bate ! Bate an' broke, God forgive me ! ' I heard the Sergeant mutter, and then——

" ' If I might speak to you alone,' Lady Loosay gasped, ' not in the presence of this man,' and Donohoe saluted at my look, and went out with a flea in his ear. I found my tongue when he'd taken his upper lip out of the office.

" ' If there is anything I can do for you, I shall be glad,' I said as gently as I could. ' You remind me rather of somebody I used to know, don't you know ?' And Lady Loosay cried out : ' You used to know me—you do know me ! Oh, Captain Gassiloe, I'm Lucy Poylett—and I've run away from Studminster Towers because mother has set her heart upon my marrying a Russian Prince who wears a wig, and father and Agatha back her up. . . . And no one is my friend but Courtheron, and he is going to India with the Bay Hussars ; and I thought if I could dress up like a boy and enlist—like Mary Ambree or one of those other brave girls—I could tell him who I was quite quietly, and sleep in his tent, and clean his sword, and fight beside him when we were in battle. But I'd no idea of the awful things that are done to people who want to enlist in the Army.' She shuddered. ' And, oh ! do save me from being dragged before the Doctor !' And then she broke down and cried, and—" The Chief's bronzed hand was busy with the sweeping white moustache. " I comforted her as well as I could, you know, don't you know ?"

" And there ends the story of the Headquarter Recruit ?" the listener might ask.

" Hardly quite there. . . . There's a bit of an end to it," and with a light in his bronze hawk-eyes that wonderfully softened the grim, sardonic expression of his lean, aquiline features, Sir Alured would go on : " Of course, the plan of campaign was to wire to Courtheron to come at once, despatch a private messenger for Lady Loosay's maid, and lock Lady Loosay up in the office until the woman arrived with her mistress's clothes. Meanwhile the Castle was ringin' with the Duchess's hysterics, and the moat and the Long Pond were bein' dragged by the gardeners, under the Duke's directions. They didn't find the body, though ! and towards the close of the engagement Lady Loosay

came up with reinforcements and carried the day. And Doubrikoff got his marchin' orders."

"And the British Army lost another Mary Ambree?" the youngster might hazard.

"There are more ways than one of servin' with the Colours," the Chief would say soberly; "and My Lady chose to wear a weddin' ring instead of a pair of—"

"Alured!" the voice of Lady Lucy would call warningly from the drawing-room.

"And there are people, mind you," Sir Alured ended, "who say that she has worn 'em for twenty-five years. Perhaps they are dee'd liars!" He would rise; "Perhaps they're not, you know, don't you know? . . . We're coming for some music, Loosay!"

And Lady Lucy would sing to the boy, in her sweet, thrilling voice, the "Ballad of Mary Ambree."

"When captains courageous, whom Death could not daunt,  
Did march to the siege of the City of Gaunt;  
They muster'd their soldiers by two and by three,  
And the bravest in battle was Mary Ambree!"

## II

### GOUGOU

You are invited, whatever your age, weight, and girth, to imagine yourself the tenant of Gougou's blue-serge sailor suit, and to think with a brain of five years old, and to maintain your outlook upon the world per medium of two very big grey eyes, their irises smutty-rimmed, their lashes very long and straight, and much darker than Gougou's shining yellow floss-silk hair.

You are begged to understand that Gougou was so sore of heart because he missed his father. It was not because Shag, the Shetland pony, and Perks, the black poodle, who begged and jumped over sticks and died for the Queen unless he wanted the biscuit too badly to do anything but bark when you showed it him, and Bluff, the big Persian cat, had receded into vast dim distance with the tall, manly figure in the loosely-cut clothes, exhaling a clean, delightful perfume of excellent cigars, and cedar and Russia-leather. It was not because the pictorial train of birds and beasts and insects, surmounting the brown-paper dado of the room in Grannie's house that sometimes served him as a London nursery, offered, in Gougou's opinion, a most despicable substitute of make-believes for the stables at Copselands with their glossy hacks and hunters, the kennels with their setters and pointers, the peacocks on the flagged terrace; the cranes and mallards and moorhens on the island in the lake, and the pheasants in the home coverts. He wanted the man who had been the axis upon which this loved world of familiar things

revolved. Once lifted and held in those strong, familiar arms, with his small pink-and-white cheek against the firm, hard, brown one, his slight arm clasped round the dear strong throat, he could have borne those other losses with a question or two and a whimper, it may have been. But to be stripped at once of everything, that made your eyes so dry that they hurt you ; and filled your throat so full of something, you didn't know what ; that you didn't much care whether stewed apricots with cream, or merely *Zucker Reis* came after the one o'clock roast mutton.

Fräulein's eyes were red. She explained, to account for their continual and ostentatious tearfulness, that she had a cold. 'Toinette's were, upon the contrary, quite dry ; but she was continually casting them up as she affirmed to Heaven that somebody was an injured angel, and somebody else a monster of wickedness. Gougou would much have liked to know the names of these two people. But when he asked he was called a poor innocent, and he hated that so much that he left off asking. And when he wanted to talk about his father, an invisible hand seemed to force an unseen gag into his mouth, and silence him at a blow. There were other red eyes in the house besides Fräulein's — Purdey, the ancient butler's, and Grannie's. Grannie read her Church Service constantly, and seemed to drink tea all the time, and never by any chance took a small boy to the Hippodrome, or to the Zoo, or to the toyshops, or even into one of the places where you sit at a little marble-topped table and eat lovely cakes, surrounded by other little marble-topped tables, where numbers of ladies and a few gentlemen are doing the same thing ; and a young lady with a marvellous head of hair, who is never the same young lady, but always just like her, comes up and sees at a glance what you have had ; and says with a sweet smile and scarcely any stops, as she tears a little ticket out of a book and hands it over : "Two cups chocol one three

cream puffs one six one open tart one eight pay at the desk please *and thank you, moddam !*"

Hinting was no use. Grannie only closed those red-rimmed eyes and shook her head with the white lace arrangement on the nice white hair slowly from side to side, and said "Not to-day, Gougou, my poor child!" and went on reading her Church Service ; while telegraph boys were ringing and handing in mysterious yellow envelopes, and two grave whiskered gentlemen in black, whose names were Masters Seel and Snelling, and who were usually attended by a trim young man who carried a cow-skin bag of documents and waited in the hall, were shut up in the library with Gougou's Mummy.

That is, they were not always shut up there, but they came every day ; and each day Mummy's eyebrows came nearer each other ; her beautiful blue eyes became harder and more stern, and her mouth shut up closer after she had said anything. All the colour seemed to have been squeezed out of it into the end of her pretty little nose. She wore matter-of-fact tailor-made gowns that did not become her, and black chiffon in the evenings, and Gougou's small soul yearned for the smiling, happy-eyed Mummy of old, clad in the dear delightful garments of dainty texture and delicate colours. Why had they all been left behind at Copselands ? Why had he been waked up in the grey mist of an October morning, and washed and dressed in an awful hurry, and lifted into the big 26 h.-p. Gohard with the landau body, with the final bit of bread-and-butter clasped in one small red hand ? Fräulein had followed, sniffing and saying, "Ach, Gott !" at intervals ; and 'Toinette, with her black eyes shining like those hedge-berries that the birds never eat, and her lips screwed into a tight, shut-up kind of smile, had followed. Mummy, in a big coat of silver fox, had sat beside Nixey, the chauffeur. And Gougou's father had not kissed him good-

bye, or even stood upon the doorsteps to see them off and wave a hand as the big car hummed out of sight at the turning in the oak avenue. Where was he? Why did nobody ever mention his name? Why was it naughty to talk about him, and to want him, when only the other day it had been so utterly right? Gougou could not, could not understand it! It was new and horrid, like the hard look in Mummy's blue eyes, Fräulein's sniffs, 'Toinette's appeals to Heaven, and the odds and ends of legal phrases that swam like dust-motes in the atmosphere of Grannie's house in Chesterfield Crescent.

"Please, Mummy, can I know what someting means?" Gougou had asked one day, after turning one of these odd, incomprehensible phrases over and over inside his little round head until it ached, as though a marble was rolling about there.

"It depends," said Mummy, in that new voice of hers, that had the ring of a cold, bright crystal tumbler rapped with the sharp edge of a knife-blade of silvered steel, "on what the something is."

Gougou edged near, shuffling in a sitting position over the Bokhara hearthrug.

"'Custody-of-ve-sole-offspwing-of-ve-mawwiage,'" he pronounced. "I know," he added, as Grannie uttered a little sound between a groan and a choke, and dropped her Church Service with a plump into her lap, "that 'Custody' means what ve policemen do to you when vey take you up. Sole offspwing is what flumoxes me."

"Little boys," said Grannie, with closed eyes, speaking over the edge of a vinaigrette she sniffed at, "should not use words like flumaxed."

"Farver says it," stated Gougou, who had been dying to mention that beloved name for days beyond counting, really nearly a week; and had been prevented by the invisible hand with the gag. Now, however, it was out

and he was glad of it. He added, with an air of determination that was assumed. "And when I grow up I shall do evwyfing vat my farver does!"

"Gerald," said Mummy, in the coldest voice Gougou had yet heard, "get up and come here." And Gougou was in the act of looking round for the mysterious Gerald when he remembered, that when his godfathers and godmothers had promised and vowed, he had been christened by that name.

"Oh! you mean me a-course!" he said, and got up and stood before Mummy's knees. He felt so strangely shy that he could not lift his big grey eyes higher than her little chin with the cleft in it. But how like prettily carved marble it looked, that little chin. She turned it a little in the high stiff collar she wore with her tailor-made gown. And her voice had again the ring given out by the cut crystal glass when the silvered steel blade hit it.

"I mean you. You have asked me a question," said Mummy coldly, "and I am going to answer it."

"Gertrude! . . . You surely don't mean! . . ." began Grannie expostulatingly and emotionally. The cold little cleft chin turned half an inch. The cold bright eyes above dealt Grannie an icy glance. She caught up her Church Service and plunged hurriedly into it. But the purple markers hung the wrong way; she was reading upside down. Gougou giggled. Then a small soft thumb and finger, with sharp delicate little nails like pink shells, took him nippingly by the ear as by a handle, and turned his face back to his mother's.

"You—hurt!" he said in a surprised whisper.

"You asked me just now," said the ringing crystal voice, "what 'sole offspring' meant? I will tell you. You are the sole offspring of my marriage with your father. That is, I have no other child but you. And from henceforth you are in my custody."

"But ladies can't be policemen," objected Gougou, with soft puckers coming between and over his downy fair eyebrows.

"They make excellent detectivees, and detectivees are a superior kind of police," retorted Gougou's mother, with a steely flash of her blue eyes and the kind of smile that showed her neat little white front teeth, and had no gaiety at all in it. "For instance, 'Toinette has served me very well as a detective."

"Gertrude! . . ." wailed Grannie, looking imploringly over her Church Service. "The child can't! . . . you won't . . . it would not be . . ."

"Allow me," retorted Mummy with a nasty kind of politeness that was worse than being rude, "to know what it is best to say to my son or to leave unsaid."

Grannie collapsed with a deprecatory whimper. Gougou, with his heart beating in his throat and choking him, made a desperate effort to keep his shy eyelids from falling under the cold, hard gaze that had come back to him, and began:

"Please, vere is somefing else I want to ask." His mouth dried up and his lips would not keep steady.

"Go on," said Mummy.

"I—I am your lickle boy," said Gougou desperately.

"But at the same time too big a boy to talk like a baby," observed Mummy, speaking a shade more like the Mummy of Gougou's dear remembrance, and less like the awful new one that had taken the place of the first. "Say 'little,' not 'lickle,' and then you can go on." She pushed back a lock of hair that always would fall over his forehead and waited.

"I am your lick—little boy," repeated Gougou obediently. He shook so that he put his hand on Mummy's knee to steady himself, and the dark brown cloth felt rough and unfriendly. "But I am my farver's boy too! And I want my farver! Please, where is he?" A sob

broke from him, and hot tears ran down his cheeks. He dried them with the cuff of his sailor jumper one after the other, his eyes on the pale, resolute, set face that used to be so soft and kind.

"I do not know," said Mummy; and the cold words fell like drops of freezing water on Gougou's heart. "He is with—with those people whose society he has chosen in preference to mine or yours. We are nothing to him henceforth, and he—"

"Gertrude!" gasped Grannie, blowing her nose with a long, trumpet-like too-too.

"And he is nothing to us!" ended Mummy.

"But how can my farver be nuffing," burst out Gougou, "when he is my farver? I—I—I don't believe vat, anyhow!"

Mummy leaned back in her chair and looked seemingly through the small rebel into the red fire behind him.

"Mother, the bell is within reach of your hand. Please ring three times."

That meant Nurse, downstairs, for Master Gougou. Gougou, anticipating her arrival, hurried to the door-handle.

"You needn't wing, fanks, Gwannie," he proclaimed, wrestling with the big white porcelain knob. "I'm going upstairs my own self!"

Grannie's jewelled hand dropped from the electric-bell stud and sought her damp handkerchief. She blew her nose again, sorrowfully and sonorously. Perhaps it was to conceal the rebellious slamming of the door. Gougou was very glad to be outside it on the black and white marble squares of the big hall, where the Emperor Napoleon the First rode a bronze horse on a gilded pedestal, and the portrait of Gougou's grandfather relieving Lucknow, in white trousers and an immense cocked hat, hung over the white marble mantelpiece in clouds of painted smoke,

with symmetrical spurts of painted fire, and arms waving swords that were straight or crooked coming out of the clouds and sepoys' heads with white turbans and grinning teeth and rolling black eyes sticking up in the foreground. Grandfather did not look at all the sort of grandfather a little boy would have gone to in trouble ; and Gougou's small nose wrinkled with distaste as he looked up at the redoubtable warrior, whose stony blue eyes stared out from under the cocked hat.

The hall door was partly open, showing a section of the foggy street, and the big Gohard car that had brought Gougou and Mummy and Fräulein and 'Toinette from dear Copselands was waiting by the kerb, and Nixey, the chauffeur, in his long dark livery overcoat with the white collar and cuffs, was standing on the doorstep talking to Purdey the butler. Neither of the men saw the child behind them.

"And so that's your opinion!" said Purdey clicking his tongue against the roof of his mouth. "Dear, dear! Ah, well!"

"Frogs I never fancied," declared Nixey stoutly. "And that 'Toinette is a deal too clever. So much so, Mr. Purdey, mark my words, that one day she'll find herself inside of four whitewashed walls with a female gaoler to rub the Prison Rules in. And if it came to asking me whether Sir Robert is to blame towards My Lady ? all I have to say is that a man can be drove by nagging and suspiciousness to deliberately make hisself out a deal owdaciouser in his conduct than he really is ; and I dare say you or me, Mr. Purdey, in my master's place, would at this moment be waiting for One Who Shall be Nameless at a Dover hotel which there is no need to specify, supposing our regular domestic arrangements to have been pulled about our ears over a week ago by a 'eadlong action on my lady's part, based on a pfectly groundless suspicion."

" Dear, dear ! Ah, well !" clicked Purdey.

" I don't conceal from you," said Nixey, pulling on his thick loose wash-leather gloves and buttoning the strap of his white cloth collar under his lean chin, " that I am on my master's side. I 'ad my instructions from him the morning I brought my lady and the boy and them two cackling women up to town, and I've 'ung about at the garage since, waiting for further orders. Now they're come. My master and She As Shall be Nameless for the present, cross to Calley by the night boat. I go with 'em in charge of the machine, and then run 'em across France by Roohong, Orleens, Boorj, and Leehong to Horange in Provency, where, I understand from her maid, a Certain Person 'as an estate in'erited through her mother, who had in her own right one of them rum-sounding titles that seem to be thought a deal of by foreigners. Sir Robert fired a wire straight off to her when my lady left him, and this is the result. I call for her at Norfolk Street, and take her down to where he's waiting. And then, and not until then, Mr. Purdey, if you'll believe me, my lady'll be the wronged and injured angel she believes herself now ! Thank you, I will take a glass of that apricot brandy of yours before I start, but as I wish to do myself credit with the run, it'll have to be the merest thimbleful !"

The hall-door swung back as the men entered, hiding a small boy in a blue-serge sailor suit, who retreated as it moved. Nixey stood near it as Purdey went into the dining-room, to return with a liqueur glass. He did not see the small boy dodge guiltily past the two shining brass buttons that glared from the back of the long-tailed livery coat like indignant eyes. He tossed off his liqueur and shook hands with Purdey, assumed his seat, pulled the lever up, and glided away, unconscious that the landau-limousine contained a passenger.

The passenger, who had gleaned from overheard frag-

ments of the conversation between the chauffeur and the butler enough meaning to inspire the belief that the journey would end at Copselands, found his quarters under the front seat a tight fit even for a small boy. He felt the Gohard stop, recognized the squeak of tightening straps as a box was fastened on behind, knew the door open, inhaled a whiff of delicate perfume, heard a frou-frou of silken linings, and saw a pair of beautiful slender feet in brown silk stockings and daintily buckled walking shoes move towards him upon the fur rug, and cross one over the other. Those pretty feet were his companions for quite half an hour of swift running on the Gohard's part, and then they drew back sharply because Gougou had sneezed. Gougou couldn't have helped that sneeze for anything. It was the pepper in the fur rug. Having sneezed, he made himself as small as possible, hoping the feminine owner of the silk stockings and buckled shoes had not heard. But she had, for the hanging cloth border of the front seat was lifted, and a soft, clear voice said : "Come out, pussy!"

"Please," said Gougou in a small, shy voice, "it isn't a lickle cat. It's a lickle boy!"

There was a pause of astonishment, and then the soft voice said, with a little shake of laughter in it :

"Come out, little boy, and tell me who you are, and why you are hiding hero?"

"Veway well!" said Gougou resignedly.

And he crawled out, very warm and breathless, and with cramp in his left knee. His big smutty-rimmed eyes looked up at the face that bent over him. And he loved something that he saw there. The face was pale and the dark eyes were full of sorrow and of weariness, and the mouth was infinitely sweet. She was wrapped in a great mantle of sables and wore a toque of velvet trimmed with the sable tails. Her black hair clung in damp waves to

her forehead as she put back her silk veil and stared at the boy, who exclaimed in a voice that wobbled with the effort not to be shy :

"I'm not *exactly* where I haven't any business ! Vis is my farver's car, and when I heard Nixey talk to Purdey about going to my farver, I fought I would cweep in and hide, so as to be tooked without Nixey's knowing anyfing." He rubbed a tear out of his eye with his cuff. "Because I haven't seen my farver for ever and ever so long. And—"

"And it hurt—" She took him in her arms and leaned her cheek down upon his hair. "I understand ! But what is it you heard Nixey say ? And who is Purdey ?"

Gougou, leaning against the soft furs, enveloped in warmth and fragrance and a tenderness that was made manifest by every look and touch and word of the lady of the buckled shoes, explained as best he might, with a sniff here and there, and once a splash of tears. To be sole offspring in the custody of Mummy, farver swallowed up, beyond all hope of recovery, in those vague quick-sands in which dear Copselands, and Shag the Shetland pony, with Perks the poodle and Bluff the Persian cat had also been engulfed, was too dreadful to be endured. Perhaps if his Gougou got to see him and explained, things might take the joyful turn ? If not, Gougou didn't know how a little boy was going to bear it ; and, in his opinion, She Who Must Be Nameless was very unkind. But perhaps she didn't understand what it meant to have your farver taken away ! That was it. She hadn't understood. . .

The car sped onwards—the grime of London long left behind. The broad, smooth high road ran between brown hedges, crimson now with the sparrows' winter store. Mist hung over the fallows and plough-lands. Beeches and elms showered down their leaves. Horse-chestnuts

dropped ripe nuts from the burst sheath, and yellow fans, and the smell of decaying vegetation rose up in faint, sweet whiffs as the car flew on. Gougou leaned his head back against the lady and grew sleepy. He felt the white, soft, jewelled hand touch his cheek as the lady pushed aside the sable mantle and drew the sleepy head against her breast. He felt a long, soft kiss upon his lips, and then knew nothing more.

He wakened in semi-darkness as the car stopped before the wide glass-doored entrance of the Dover Hotel. His head was pillow'd on a great sable muff, a bunch of violets was pinned to the front of his little blue-serge jumper. He could feel the cool, soft flowers and smell their sweet fragrance. Then the door opened. He jumped up with a cry of joy, and flung himself on the tall, broad-shouldered figure in the well-known loose tweed clothes, and hugged the strong neck and cried, covering the tanned face with eager kisses.

“Farver ! farver !”

“My God ! it’s the boy !” said farver’s voice, as Nixey’s spare figure and lean face and peaked cap showed in the blue-white glare of the electric standards at the hotel entrance. “And she ! . . . Where is she ? What has happened ?”

“I’m not to blame, Sir Robert,” quavered Nixey. “Mrs. Arbuthnot got out at Charing. She said something had been forgotten in the ‘aste of her arrangements, and that she must return by train ; and that she had written a note, and Master Gougou was to give it to his father. Upon my soul, sir——”

The note was scrawled in pencil on half a sheet of letter-paper and had been pinned with the bunch of violets on Gougou’s serge jumper. Gougou’s father read the note, standing in the blue-white radiance of the hotel lamps, and his face was as the face of one dead ; only the deep fold

between his eyebrows, and the deep lines at the corners of his mouth, and the burning grey eyes that devoured those pencilled lines belonged to a living man in bitter pain.

*"I could have taken your wife's husband away from her without a pang of remorse,"* ran the scrawl, *"but I cannot rob your boy of his father! Please do not write to me or attempt to see me. I am determined we shall not meet again!"*

And she kept her word.

### III

#### THE MAN IN THE WOODS AND FORESTS

THE desire to love, cherish, protect, and supply the eldest Miss Wiltshire with all the comforts of civilization and all the luxuries of refinement, drove Brydon Janes, a very worthy young man with large feet, into the wilderness. Fort-villas, Portsdown-road, Southsea, Hants, was the address of the Paradise where dwelt his Eve. He had spent his three probationary years—two at Oxford University and one in the forests of the Continent—by the consent of the English Government, and at his own expense. Being selected under the Regulations to serve in the Forest Department of India as Assistant-Conservator at Rs. 4,000 *per annum*, he knew himself to be a made man. He would win advancement by much striving, become a full Conservator and head of a Department, and then return home to claim the eldest Miss Wiltshire as his bride.

Etta was drowned in tears when Brydon Janes departed. She did not dry them until the rickety four-wheeler that contained her beloved had turned out of the Portsdown-road, and her younger sister—a girl of tender years and sharp intelligence—said, warningly :

“ You’ll have a red nose at the Eastney ball to-night if you don’t blow it and stop crying, Etta !”

The eldest Miss Wiltshire looked in the glass, and took the advice. She did no more crying, but danced her white satin shoes into holes with great goodwill. Brydon’s cheap yellow deck-shoes burst like over-ripe oranges ere

the P. and O. s.s. *Rangore* anchored off Ballard Pier, and the launch came fussing out for the passengers and their hand-baggage. But his heart, which was not of cheap Tottenham Court Road make, was staunchly loyal to the distant Miss Wiltshire. In his stuffy 15R bungalow in a steaming hot village in the Central Provinces, where he wrought under the rule of Deasy, the Conservator, and helped to control a division containing four districts and nine tributary States covered with primeval forest and immemorial tiger-jungle, inhabited by aboriginal Sonthals and Khonds, he tasted the heady wine of power. And he was not unhappy. Every week's mail brought him a letter from Etta and took one to her from him. It was only when fresh photographs arrived, and he recognized by the altered fashion of Etta's dress and the strange new modes in which she dressed her hair, how swiftly Time was passing, that he knew disquiet, and paced the verandah instead of sleeping in his cot or working at the office-table whereon he burned the midnight oil. He was never the man to change, the prematurely-faded portraits that he forwarded to Fort-villas showed nothing new. Perhaps his good, dull eyes had learned to look keenly at his new world, his once slack mouth had gained lines of decision, just as his hands had hardened by constant use of rein, rifle, and revolver, and his thighs had acquired the muscular grip of the accustomed rider to whom saddle and stirrups are not the essential things about a horse. But the eyes that scanned the spotty sun-pictures saw only the old Brydon. The man who had kissed Etta two years, four years, seven years ago, and whom she had promised to marry when he should have earned enough to support a wife, was not capable of improvement in her eyes. His poverty galled her for him ; she hid the cheap gifts that came from him away, lest sneering eyes should appraise their worthlessness.

" You know the shabby little turquoise ring with the three bad green stones, that was Etta's engagement ring ?" said the youngest Miss Wiltshire, now eighteen, and out, in confidence to one of her newest friends. " Well, she has covered it up with another she bought at Liberty's, that is three times the size, and cost half her dress-allowance for the year ; and she never blinked when grandmamma praised Brydon's generosity in sending the new ring ; and don't you think it looks as if——"

" It looks as if the Man in India—the Man in the Woods and Forests—who never comes home," said the friend, who was unimaginative, " was going to hear before long that Etta is tired of playing the waiting game !"

Possibly Etta was. She had met scores of better-looking, better-bred, better-off men than Brydon Janes during the last seven years, and had refused three or four proposals on the score of a previous engagement. She was never without an admirer in tow, and her ball programme was scrawled with pencilled names from the first square to the last extra long before the rickety brougham turned in at the Dockyard, or passed the barrack-gates, or drew up at the wide doorway of the Naval College, or halted under the edge of the shabby, striped awning that goes up in front of the Assembly Hall on dance-nights. She never missed a tennis-match, golf-club tea or luncheon, garden-party or picnic. She took all the gloves and trinkets she could get, but she never wrote out to Jali Wudar, in the Central Provinces, to say that she had changed her mind and wished to be released from her engagement. Her letters were invariably the same, beginning " My Dearest," and ending " Ever your own," and Brydon kept them with naphthaline crystals in a tin hat-box for their preservation from the white ants. His own epistles were stereotyped effusions—the same well-worn references to people, stale jests, and homely expressions of affection appeared over and over again—only the envelopes were different.

Sometimes these were musty and mildew-speckled from the rains ; other times they were crackly and yellow from sun and dust. The greasy mark of the post-runner's cleft-stick was upon some. Once the wrapper was dabbled with dried blood. That was the night of the raid on the bungalow of the Assistant-Conservator, whose little battered English-made cash-box was supposed to contain wealth untold ; riches well worth much expensive outlay of palm-oil on the part of predatory Khonds.

"‘One of the beggars got shot, unluckily !’” wrote the Assistant-Conservator, “‘and my writing-table and blotting-book (the one you gave me) got rather messed up, and I hope you will excuse this ; until the new consignment of stationery arrives at the station’nary an envelope is to be had.’”

“Oh, why will he try to pun ?” groaned the youngest Miss Wiltshire, as Etta read this out.

“I think Brydon has a good deal of humour,” said Etta musingly. She continued to read :

“‘Luckil they did not get off with my cash-box, all your photographs are in it. I am sending your mother a teapot by this mail ; the figure on the lid is Loha Pennou, the Tiger god, a very popular deity out here.’ . . .”

“I decline to drink tea out of anything so horrible !” announced Mrs. Wiltshire, with a rebellious clash of knitting-needles.

“But I shall tell Brydon you are delighted with the teapot,” said the eldest Miss Wiltshire, holding her handsome head very high.

“Isn’t it time we all made an end of pretending to like things we don’t really want or care for ?” asked the youngest Miss Wiltshire suddenly. You can hear the dull thud of the bombshell dropped by the daring girl into the family circle, the crackle of the Major’s newspaper as he suddenly lowers it, the gasp of the mother petrified over her needles, the sputter of the fuse as it glows and goes out. For the eldest

Miss Wiltshire, without turning a hair, continued to read the letter :

“ ‘ By my sitting tight here and sticking to things, what we both hope for may be gained in the long-run. When Deasy retires I see a fair prospect of promotion, and then, in five or six years——’ There is a little bit here that is meant only for me,” said the eldest Miss Wiltshire calmly.

“ Five or six years—five or six—I am sick of his hopes and his promises !” bewailed Mrs. Wiltshire ; “ and if you were my true flesh and blood, Etta, my ow-own daughter, you would sicken of them too. It’s beyond the patience of human nature ! and I pray Heaven——”

“ Hold your d——d tongue, Arabella,” growled the Major, over the top of the *Hampshire Courier*, and Arabella obeyed. That night, as the youngest Miss Wiltshire confined her pretty fair hair in unnecessary curling-pins, her elder sister surprised her by sweeping into the shabby little bedroom and sitting down imperially on the narrow bed.

“ I want to speak to you, Gerty. You think me a fool for not breaking off my engagement to Brydon Janes. So does mother ; so does father ; so does everybody ; perhaps I do myself. But I hope God will help me to go on being a fool ! It is better,” she said—the handsome head still very erect—“ to be a fool than a traitor. And Brydon never dreams that I could be one. Perhaps ”—she bit her lips sharply—“ that has kept me from being one. Now, good-night ; I am going for a long drive with Captain McOrdle, of the Royal Kailshires, in his new motor-car to-morrow, and I want to borrow your silk scarf-veil. That is why I came.”

Captain McOrdle was the son of the Scots millionaire jam-boiler whose preserves have found their certain way into the bosom of English domestic life. His motor-car—“ a cool eight hundred, dear boy, *minus* the canopy and nickel fittings ”—his horses, his dogs, his guns and hunters, were discussed and re-discussed by men at clubs, in Fleet ward-rooms and

Garrison mess-rooms, while his flirtations, engagements, intrigues, served women with an inexhaustible fund of interesting gossip and a never-failing opportunity for emulation. He had danced eight times at the last Marine Artillery ball with the eldest Miss Wiltshire, and, to his astonishment, had emerged from the palm-shaded corners of the seductive corridor as unkissed as Gladstone Dowie. This kindled his pride, knowing himself a big fish, and he stooped perforce to woo. He invited the unreluctant goddess to drive in the palatial locomotive, and learned in one of the ferny chalk lanes of Havant that even did he seek in marriage the empty hand of the eldest Miss Wiltshire, it could not be his ; she was engaged to a man in India whom she did not intend to throw over. She said so—this woman of thirty, who had waited ten years.

"Not even if *I* asked you ?" the Captain murmured, in tones as sweet as the paternal jam. The automobile was running smoothly down between the high, steep banks as he spared his left hand from the driving-wheel to encroach upon Miss Wiltshire's waist, and as she shook her handsome head and moved discouragingly away, the accident occurred. The gradient had steepened, the driver had lost control, his furious attempt to brake jammed a lever, the machine charged the bank at a dangerous curve where the hollow red pyramid topped its post in official warning. McOrdle was thrown into a ploughed field, breaking his collarbone ; as he sprawled amongst the green wheat one may leave him there without questioning his reflections. Turn we to the eldest Miss Wiltshire, who lay still, with the costly ear upon her ; and when they took her back to the shabby family villa in the Portsdown Road—for with what voice she had she ordered those who found her to carry her home —she did not stop there twenty-four hours.

But before she went she gave private orders to the youngest Miss Wiltshire : "Don't snivel, Gerty, you stupid!"

but do exactly as I say. Keep this a secret until *he* has what he hopes for. Don't kill the courage in him while he has promotion to win. When he has won it, then you shall tell him ! If you disobey, you little donkey, I'll haunt you if I can ! . . . Now the Vicar can come, if he likes, and the rest of them, but it seems such a fuss about nothing !"

So died the eldest Miss Wiltshire, who must have had a Roman drop in her blue veins, and the youngest Miss Wiltshire undertook to write to "that man," and relieve the family of his deceased *fiancée* of a duty they ardently longed to shirk.

It was the youngest Miss Wiltshire who opened the next letter from Jali Wudar, in the Central Provinces. The envelope was not stained, like the last, but it was of a different texture to the paper Brydon Janes had always written on. Even his handwriting seemed different—smaller, younger, and more clear—but the youngest Miss Wiltshire might be mistaken.

"The forests are improving greatly ; there has been a record maowah harvest. The elephants and the herbivorous animals, some of the birds, and most of the insects are gorging gloriously, and the wild men join in the debauch with the wild creatures, and get most royally drunk. Of the white velvety flowers, exhaling a heavenly perfume, they distil a heady kind of arraek that smells far enough from heavenly to make a Khond hold his nose—and the Khond nose is not a sensitive organ, let me tell you. . . ."

Where were the laboured jests, the stale allusions familiar to the youngest Miss Wiltshire since her pigtailed days ? A new breath had blown upon the writer. His eyes saw new things, and his brain distilled them, drop by drop, upon the paper :

" You will be glad to hear that I have sold my Grammar and Vocabulary of the Sonthal dialect to a firm of pub-

lishers in Calcutta for quite a respectable sum. I am drawing up a special Report of the Kalua Forest for the Nizam. Two hundred native wood-cutters and toddy-collectors were killed by king-cobras there last season. This is the great green Hamadryad, most glorious of reptiles, which they say was the original Snake of Eden, only instead of grovelling under the Curse, this brute goes upright, a full half of him reared above earth, and before he strikes he spits ! a jet of clear poison, thick as glycerine—deadly where there happens to be a scratch upon the skin. . . .”

“I don’t know what has happened to him,” said the youngest Miss Wiltshire. “He is changed in some way, and I like the change.”

“I remembered,” went on the writer, “that this ought to be a love-letter when I had nearly finished the sheet. . . . What ought one to put in a love-letter, by rights ? The essence of the mauve-and-rose of the sunset, and the mocking-bird’s bul-bul note. The perfume of tuberose and jessamine, and the sweetness of all the songs that lovers sing to the sitar under the Indian moon.”

“Now he is trying to be poetical and literary,” interpolated the youngest Miss Wiltshire, “and I think ‘Janes on Cobras’ is better reading.”

“I hope that will do for her,” said young Dick Kirwin, the man who had tried to be literary and poetical, and who was acting as Assistant-Conservator in the place of Brydon Janes, violently deceased some months before. “I’ve given her a slice or so out of what Pepys called ‘My Diurnall,’ and ended with a squeeze of Housman and water. What business had poor old Janes to strap such a burden on my back just because he was dying here all alone of blood-poisoning from the wound of a Khond’s filthy copper-bladed knife, and couldn’t bear the middle-aged girl he had been engaged to since the year one to be told the truth ?

But he must have known it would come out some day. . . . Under any circumstances my handwriting is decenter than his was. Wonder she's such a fool!"

He grumbled like this, but he went on writing every mail, and grew to like the replies. They were much younger than the writer, judging by the half-dozen or so of photographs that had lain at the bottom of the battered cash-box, and which Kirwin had sent home to the relatives of Brydon Janes with the other effects of the dead man. They suggested saucy blue eyes, and an impertinent, tip-tilted nose, and a willowy figure—all three things really pertaining to the personality of the youngest Miss Wiltshire. Upon her side she put the vision of Brydon Janes as she had known him, totally from her, and decked an imaginary countenance with a dark moustache and bright brown eyes to match. The figure supporting the countenance was slight and well-knit, middle-sized and young.

Fate was kinder to the successor of Brydon Janes than it had been to Brydon. Deasy retired on a pension within two years, and R. Kirwin, Esq., compiler of the Grammar and Vocabulary of the Sonthal Dialect, the man who had drawn up the Kalua Forest Report for the Nizam, and had made a study of the habitat of the king-cobra, stepped easily into his superior's shoes, as the dead man never could have done. As Full Conservator, with the praises of the Department sounding in his ears, he drew his first quarter's salary. Upon Rs. 12,000 per annum a man may marry, but he would take leave and go home first, and look about him. They were very glad to see him in the Earl's Court Road, but before he had been there a week he ran down to Southsea. "Rather a painful duty to perform in connection with a poor woman, who is—a—er—relative of the man who was my predecessor at Jali Wudar. Think I'd better get it off my chest before I settle down, mater!"

"Go, dear, of course!" said she; and Mr. Richard Kirwin

went, sent in his card at Fort Villas, and asked to see "Miss Wiltshire." Great Scott ! When the woman came, she was a girl—a girl ! Slight, with blue eyes and wavy fair locks, and the tip-tilted nose that against the evidence of the photographs he had ascribed to his correspondent—Etta Wiltshire.

"I am the only Miss Wiltshire left. Two of us are married, and Etta died—that was more than two years ago. Did you want to see her—to give a—a message from—from anybody—who—does not know that she is dead ? Oh, Mr. Kirwin, if you are his friend, you will understand why she wished him never to be told until he had got his promotion!"

"He was promoted more than two years ago," said the young man, who had come to break the long-delayed news of Brydon Janes's death to his sweetheart. "He died of a wound—he got it the night dacoits came after his cash-box. It is awfully sad——"

"It is not sad at all !" said the youngest Miss Wiltshire, with wet eyes, "at least, not for Etta and Brydon. They had waited so patiently . . . they died within a week of each other. Etta must have laughed for joy, I think, to find him there, upon the Other Side—for I know, I know that they have met."

"They have met," said Dick Kirwin stoutly, as he held her hands across those two graves, "and so have we."

The youngest Miss Wiltshire did not attempt to deny a fact so obvious.

## IV

### HOW FARLINGBY FLEW

AVIATION, that infectious disease of the New Century, had broken out with violence in Hopshire. An extensive expanse of arable land, devoted during the greater part of the year to the culture of the profitable hop, offered a peculiarly advantageous site for a temporary flying-ground. The county, spurred by the feverish activities of Farlingby, elected a Committee of Management, and appointed the enthusiast Honorary Secretary.

Funds rolled in to swell the Prize List, an Official Programme of Events was compiled, a really neat and effective set of Rules drawn up. It was only when Farlingby rose in protest against the clause that prohibited subscribers and members of Committee from competing, that the President, Lord Potterby, and his fellow-landholders realized what a presumptuous ass they had hitherto regarded as an intelligent, fairly presentable, highly eligible young man.

Farlingby, in brief, announced his intention of entering his own home-made monoplane, *Ladybug*, owner up, for the Highest Flight. If a man be admittedly not a prophet in his own country, still less is he an aviator in his own county. And that Farlingby should thus seek to elevate himself above the level of his social equals was, as Lord Potterby very appropriately expressed it, a discovery painfully calculated to lower him in their esteem.

The prize for the Highest Flight was a silver shaving-basin containing a cheque for £500. Farlingby's ambitious

determination to compete for the possession of these might have earned the additional stigma of greed if the young man had not himself put up the money. This fact, with the additional arguments of Farlingby's having largely subscribed towards the expenses of the meeting, and being the proprietor of the considerable area of arable devoted to flying, resulted in the objectionable clause being blotted from the minutes.

The faces of Lord Potterby and his brother magnates afforded a study in disgust as Farlingby's agile pen performed its task. The Rural Dean permitted himself a gentle sarcasm as he helped himself, with his handsomest Early Victorian manner, to a pinch of snuff.

"I—umph!—would venture to suggest that Mr. Farlingby should—umph!—also enter for the Potterby Consolation Award of fifty pounds, generously offered—umph!—by his lordship, our President, for the benefit of the competitor who shall—umph!—sustain the severest casualty to his own personal framework in the—umph!—noble struggle for the mastery of air."

It is doubtful whether Farlingby heard. He squeezed the blotting-pad over the official paper, and his thoughtful eye glided over the polished hemisphere of Lord Potterby's bald crown without noticing the crimson hue which had mounted from the President's large face to his forehead, and now swamped the bump of benevolence in a rush of seething indignation as the old gentleman spluttered:

"The fellow's skull's cracked already, past mending, hang me if it isn't! And what I say is"—his lordship addressed himself to the secretary—"if your good father, my late partner in the firm of Farlingby and Grains, could have heard the boy he piled up money for, announcing his intention of ranking himself with the pack of da—of blessed atmospherical acrobats who're turning everybody's heads with their hairbreadth escapes and record flights, he'd—

he'd be sorry he died and left him co-proprietor in the Brewery!"

There was a rolling back of chairs—Farlingby's chairs—round the twenty-foot long Jacobean table in Farlingby's dining-room. The Committee looked at their watches, and broke up. Presently they rolled away down the long avenue in the vehicles that had brought them—automobiles, landaus, broughams, dog-carts, the Dean's aged cob waxing frisky at the snorting motor-cycle of Habbets, the local attorney. But Lord Potterby remained to say his say, and said it.

" You've lowered yourself, lowered yourself, in my opinion, young man ! Put yourself on a level with people who sing and people who act, and people who paint, and people who write novels, and people who run, and jump and swim, and row, for money, sir, for money ! Granted the money's your own, the theory's the same. And what I say is"—the indignant peer smote the three-hundred guinea Jacobean oak table resoundingly—" I'm disgusted ! Dis-gusted ! And—though I was damned angry with my girl Ethel when she went as much against my own desire as your father's testamentary wishes—and said, plump and plain, she wouldn't marry such a gaby as Dicky Farlingby for nuts !—I'll allow she was right to a tick, or the price-ticket of the handsomest row of pearls Piffamy ever strung together, and I'll wire him to send a shopman down with 'em on my way home."

This was frightful, but Farlingby, though doubly wrung by the cruel utterance of his charmer, and the defection of the paternal ally, was able, upon repairing to the gymnasium he had converted into a workshop, there to find comfort in contemplating the newly varnished bamboo-and-steel-rod framework of the *Ladybug*, whose 'Ananzi' engine worked, according to the mechanic in charge, as "smooth as cream."

A day or two later Farlingby's absorption in his winged and humming piece of mechanism rendered him unconscious of the approach of a being whose lightest footfall had previously possessed the power to thrill his being. The Hon. Ethel Grains, only child and heiress of Lord Potterby, looked in upon him in his workshop. Her clear voice behind him made him jump in his oily blue overalls as she said :

" I see you're up to your withers here in preparation for the big event. Say if I'm in the way, won't you ? I just looked in to see how things were going."

Usually at the sight of the Honourable Ethel, Farlingby's stock of self-possession deserted him. So poor-spirited and unoriginal was the young man that his desire jumped with the paternal wishes. His large projecting ears would redden, his blue eyes would become vague and misty, his ideas would be churned to buttermilk by the pounding dasher of his heart, his voice would wobble in the enunciation of the coldest commonplae. But, as the Ananzi engine purred, and the nickel propeller vanished in a mist of uncountable revolutions, the inventor forgot his mistress in contemplation of his machine, and took the first upward step in the lady's estimation.

" I beg your pardon, Ethel ! Of course, I'm more than delighted to see you. For Heaven's sake be careful ! . . . Your shoulder's touching my left wing ! "

Farlingby's mild, preoccupied frown had given place to a glare of anxiety as he sprang to investigate for possible injury. A gasp of relief escaped him as he ascertained that the light steel-tube-framed, canvas-covered pinion of his darling *Ladybug* was perfectly intact. Her bicycle-wheels leaned up in a corner, awaiting attachment to the frame, her india-rubber air-box was being fitted in its place above the double tail-planes by Farlingby's mechanic-assistant. And as the air-draught created by

the revolutions of the propeller fanned the lank, light hair of the would-be aviator back from a brow the Honourable Ethel had disparagingly stigmatized as "bumpy," she admitted with a revulsion of repentance that it was his best feature, after all! and, taking leave, steered her 42 h.p. Dragette homewards in a series of hairbreadth escapes, unobserved by herself, but painfully trying to the nerves of the chauffeur.

Farlingby completed his machine, and, after putting her to divers secret, blaek, and midnight tests upon the flying-ground, felt himself nerved with sufficient confidence in *Ladybug* to support the openly-expressed doubts of club acquaintances and county neighbours as to his sanity. The day of the meeting saw the brown, carefully-levelled acres of the flying-ground blackened by huge crowds of would-be sightseers; the *élite* of Hopshire society thronged the canvas-screened visitors' enclosure, and filled the grand-stands to overflowing; the Yeomanry Band, occupying an elegantly decorated pavilion, opened the programme with the overture to the "Flying Dutchman." Then, upon the stroke of one, three engines simultaneously whirred and clattered; three aeroplanes of characteristically different patterns issued amidst deafening cheers from the sheds, scuttling along upon their widely-distant bicycle-wheels with the gait of leggy, impossible, prehistoric insects; and the programme of events had begun in good earnest.

M. Schiff, of Antwerp, who finds that steering an aeroplane is as simple as driving a sewing-machine, was, perhaps, the star of the galaxy assembled for the occasion. Events innumerable have been pulled off by the dauntless Schiff. But upon this occasion, in mild May weather, with sunshine to prevent the coagulation of lubricating-oil,

with breezes to buoy up the structure of his celebrated biplane, the dauntless Schiff failed to rise from the ground.

The Marchese Gallonini Popoli, one of the Italian pioneers of aviation, had entered for the opening long-distance trial with the celebrated original model machine of box-kite pattern upon which he won the great Campagna prize of 80,000 lire. But in vain did the Italian noble essay to abandon the element referred to by an excited old lady as "terra-cotta." His giant box-kite declined upon any terms to soar.

It was just the same with M. le Baron Jourdain, of Villerville. Himself weighing three hundred pounds, and carrying one hundred litres of petrol in addition to his wife, a lady of robust physique and incipient moustache, M. Jourdain has won the suffrages of all aero sportsmen by his daring flights upon the *Petite Demoiselle* triplane of his own invention, which travels like an express train against winds of high velocity, and leaves in the wake of its 60 h.p. Dedale engine a well-developed cyclone.

Sacred corpse of a pig ! *Nom d'un petit bonhomme !* *Petite Demoiselle*, holder of three world's records, rose in air amidst the acclamations of assembled Hopshire, only to reach an inconsiderable altitude of thirty feet, and flop like an exhausted giant cockchafer back upon the stony bosom of perfidious Albion, smashing a blade of her aluminium propeller, buckling a front wheel, crumpling her hindmost flying-plane as completely as a bandbox, and snapping the collar-bone of her indignant owner. Madame la Baronne fortunately fell upon her toque, a Parisian creation of density equalling its magnitude, thus sustaining no injury.

Event succeeded event ; competitor after competitor failed to rise, and, as the afternoon waned, a deadly flatness, a wet blanket of depression, settled upon the immense

pack of spectators. Luncheon brought relief, but the mercury dropped again when the refreshment-interval was over. The public had paid to see men win prizes for flying ; and up to the present, with the exception of the strapped and bandaged Baron, who had undeniably qualified for the Potterby consolation-award, no man had offered the public any return for its outlay.

The first after-luncheon event upon the card was the contest for the possession of the silver shaving-dish and the five-hundred-guinea cheque. The languid interest of the mass of spectators quickened as Lieutenant Baldalara of the Basque Carabineers, the well-known member of the Cercle Aéronautique, dashed from his concealing shed, mounted on his famous flyer, and, urged from behind by three muscular assistants, shot forwards, palpably reared, and—rose gracefully into the air. The Yeomanry Band rushed into the Basque National Hymn, every bosom swelled with enthusiasm, every neck was cricked to anguish, and every eye strained in the pursuit of the soaring Carabineer.

An instant later the *Ladybug*, her owner up, jolted through the rolled-back doors of her shelter, and, trundled by the mechanic who was Farlingby's handyman and jack-of-all-trades, made her *début*. . . . *Ladybug*, then only existent in the original example, was a queer-looking machine, and to-day, when thousands of reproductions are being turned out to supply the increasing public demand for a strong reliable skyster, is not one whit less so. We know how the low-comedy entrance of the Clown into the Ring, mounted upon his grotesquely piebald donkey, follows upon the stately appearance of the glossy blood chestnut, bearing the dazzling exponent of the *haute école*, and evokes in an instant, upon the heels of the reverberating thunder-roll of admiring approbation, a roar of Homeric laughter.

Hopshire, sadly in need of comic relief up to the moment roared itself purple in the face at the appearance of Farlingby, dressed in a tweed cycling-suit of cheerful green-and-chocolate chequers, wearing his inevitable pink button-hole carnation, spectacles, a peaked yellow leather cap, and gaiters matching the cap; and perched behind the revolving nickel antennæ of the *Ladybug* in the cramped attitude affected by the little jockey who crouches on the withers of the tall, leggy racehorse. Only, our Farlingby's racehorse wore a pair of very showy, very stiff, yellow varnished canvas wings, and carried a drum-shaped air-box of india-rubbered canvas immediately behind the aluminium petrol tank; and scuttled over the ground upon three miniature cycle-wheels, painted, like the steel-and-bamboo frame they supported, a lively postal-pillar-box vermilion.

"Shove!" yelled Farlingby, to his factotum, gripping the levers. As he turned his head, a paper crackled in his breast-pocket, a pair of scornful, indignant eyes bored holes in him from the President's box upon the Grand Stand. The pencilled note said :

"Foolish, my dear Dieky! Why want me to promise that if *Ladybug* wins the prize for the Highest Flight I will marry you? You know that queer gazebo of yours can't fly a yard for nuts! Ask something easier!"

"Yours,  
"ETHEL."

"Can't fly a yard for nuts, can't you!" muttered the smarting inventor, conscious of those successful secret trials as *Ladybug* pitched under him, reared, and, to the amazement of the assembled county, steadily rose into the air. Baldalara at the same instant, warned by the hiccoughing of his engine that all was not well, glanced at the graduated registering ten-metre barometer, saw

the minimum height of 50 recorded, stopped his engine, and made a rather clumsy descent.

Meanwhile Farlingby flew. . . .

When he reached the minimum altitude of two hundred and sixty feet, and in smooth, sweeping, ascending circles continued the ascent that was only to terminate when six times that height had been achieved, the gladsome bellowings of acclaiming Hopshire were left far beneath him. Alone with his glorious, realized ambition, his feverish passion left behind with its object upon the base level of inglorious earth, Farlingby was conscious of nothing save that he was happy. When at last he descended, in a series of long, swooping glides, gracefully to ground ; when the Yeomanry Band burst into "See the Conquering Hero," and the crowd cheered itself hoarse—he was not elate, but calmly content. When the President, the Committee, and the county congratulated him ; when the silver shaving-dish with his own cheque in it was placed in his hands by the lady of the Lord-Lieutenant ; when the place of honour was accorded Farlingby, the flyer at the banquet whose *menu* he himself had planned ; when he rose to return thanks to the toast that was drunk in his own excellent champagne, to the hero of the Hopshire Flying Meeting—Farlingby was only conscious of having fulfilled his destiny, and embarked upon his career. When, the toast-drinking over, the male banqueters joined the ladies in the drawing-room of the marquee, and the exquisite Ethel, with a conscious blush, swept her silken draperies from the little chair she had been keeping hidden for Farlingby, he knew no rapture, he experienced no thrill. He realized that *Ladybug* was infinitely dearer to him than the Honorable Ethel. He knew that he no longer coveted the large, handsome hand of Lord Potterby's daughter . . . that, were it offered him, he should not know what to do with it . . . And, remembering the pencilled note that had crackled in the breast-pocket

of the absurd green-and-chocolate suit, he knew a gush of relief in the undoubted fact that it embodied a distinct refusal.

"Richard . . . Dicky . . ." The Honorable Ethel was distinctly affectionate. Farlingby glanced about him nervously, but there was no escape. Her breath was warm upon his cheek, her whisper in his ear :

"Forgive me ! I was wrong ! . . . I am ready to atone for my foolish, mistaken judgment."

"With regard," hinted Farlingby, "to 'the gazebo that can't fly for nuts ?'"

"Ah, you are unkind ! But so was I. We'll never quarrel again, will we, Dicky ? You don't know how proud I am," whispered the vanquished Ethel, "that this great day has made me yours !"

Farlingby said, feeling the net falling over his head :

"Miss Potterby——"

"Am I not Ethel," she murmured reproachfully, "as you are my Dicky ? For you are my Dicky, aren't you ?"

"You—you must ask me something easier," said Farlingby heartlessly. "Excuse me, Lady Cockerell of Bangwood is beckoning me with her fan."

## V

## THE QUALITY OF MERCY

IT was six o'clock in the afternoon, and for a June day quite warm and sunshiny. I had congratulated the head gardener upon the successful grafting of a new South American elematis upon an English stock, I had picked a snail from a trellis, and mourned over a pale yellow-green ring of immature white-heart cherries lying scattered at the foot of the sturdy young tree that had borne them so proudly only yesterday. I had picked an early tea-rose of lovely orange-red, and, leaving Ap Gryffyth to go to his tea, I passed out through the soil-and-pot-yard that adjoins his own neat cottage-garden into the dusty white road. On my left was the dip that leads to Testerford Bridge, on my right the road that leads to the crossways where you branch off for Oxford, or make for Dorchester, or push forwards between flowering bean-fields and thrush-haunted garden-orchards to Warstrife village-green, dominated by a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman church tower, commanding one of the loveliest views in the Valley of the Thames.

Lehermit, as I clicked the gate, came buffling down the road in his ugly mustard-coloured Huyper roadster, braking carefully, and hugging the fence, because he meant to turn in at his own garage-yard. Beside him sat a fresh-coloured young groom—a well-knit, curly-headed Englishman of twenty-six or twenty-seven, wearing a well-cut and rather well-worn suit of Lehermit's—coat and breeches of grey tweed mixture, worn with a striped livery waist-

coat of yellow and black. He sat on the edge of the near side of the front seat, ready to jump down and open the yard gate for his master. And I noticed his well-made tan leggings and neat boots, as one notices things of no account, while the mustard-coloured car slid by. Then I turned my head away from the road as I reached for the catch of the gate—and then came a spatter of stinging dust-particles on the back of my neck, and a sound like the beating of wings. . . . In contempt of the notice-board posted farther up the road, urging careful going upon the passing motorist, a great car, driven at reckless speed, had gone by with the dash of a swallow, and without the warning hoot of a horn. . . . And then, simultaneously, came a snarling shout : “Get out o’ the way !” and a dull, sickening thump ! and a crash of splintered glass, and I knew that an accident had happened.

Only a little way down the road. As I hurried to the spot, men came up running from the gardens, from the stables, from the dynamo-houses, from the yards. A great, magnificent, shining car—a 30 h.p. automobile on Mercédes lines, but with a high-backed British difference—was pulled up on the wrong side of the road. It held four people—two ladies, whose veil-screened, flowery hats showed over the hood, and as I drew nearer I saw that a liveried chauffeur occupied the driver’s seat, and that an elderly gentleman in a sumptuous seal-lined coat, and cap with ear-flaps and eye-guards, sat beside him.

The victim lay in the road, face downwards, very still, a foot from the near back-wheel of the magnificent car. A dark stream flowed from the bloody head which lay in the white dust, and a horrible red puddle had formed in a slight hollow underneath him. He had ceased to take any interest in the affairs of this life. The occupants of the great and splendid car bestowed not a glance upon him. They were discussing in low voices among themselves

as to whether it would not be to their advantage, in the absence of a constable with a notebook, to depart from that place with rapidity. I saved them the trouble by reading their number out aloud, and ostentatiously making a note of it. At that, an oval, disdainful face—the face of a young woman of twenty-five, dark-eyed, with straight brows and a set mouth—glanced at me coldly and contemptuously from over the high, padded side of the sumptuous car, and, reading in my own face, it may be, a very decided opinion of the day's work, turned away, studying the grey arch of Testerford Bridge and the broad, wind-whipped river rolling down between its banks of raw, un-sunned green, fringed with willows that swayed and tore their hair like Irish keeners at a wake.

Lehermit came up, grey-faced and horror-stricken. Ghastly gardeners and scared grooms helped us to raise the prostrate, dusty, and blood-drenched figure in the torn and ragged tweed coat. As the battered, unrecognizable head fell upon the breast, its gaping, scarlet scalp-wound showed. Then it rolled helplessly back upon Lehermit's shoulder.

I saw in one sickening glance that the right brow was cruelly beaten in, and the right eye partly torn from the socket. Four days ago I, who write, saw this thing, and it hovers now between my pen and the paper, and I can hear a woman's voice, with a hard ring in it, saying : “ All the man's own fault. . . . What nonsense ! . . . He tried to cross the road. . . . Don't be a fool, mother, for goodness sake ! ”

Advised after this filial fashion, the elderly lady, the second occupant of the hooded back-seat, left off saying that such an unpleasant thing had never happened before, and, controlling her chin, gazed over the landscape in emulation of her daughter. It would have been better to have been a fool, like the housemaid upon an errand,

who had dismounted from her bicycle, and was kneeling in the dabbled dust, regardless of her black afternoon frock, and with her cap streamers anyhow, holding one of the limp hands, and saying : " Poor dear ! poor dear ! . . ." It would have been far, far better to have wiped the smothering blood from the blue, quivering lips and the pinehed nostrils, as did the girl in the muslin gown who had come running from the croquet-lawn of the adjoining riverside villa, followed by her flannel-clad opponent in the singles ; better even to have stood by with twitching lips and brimming eyes of pity, like the grey-haired, elderly lady who, with a companion, had come up, walking with the help of a stout stick and carrying a sketching-block and colour-box, and who now stood leaning upon her staff on the borders of the little knot of Samaritans. It would have been better not to have earned such lowering looks of resentment and hate and contempt as those upon the weather-beaten faces of the working-men, better not to have brought that cold gleam of scorn into Lehermit's pale eyes, or have evoked such glances of mingled fear and wonder as were directed at the pale young lady in the magnificent automobile by the women clustered upon the road. But no individual voice was raised in reproach or expostulation until the grey-haired, elderly lady lifted hers.

" It is murder ! No, Ella, I will not be contradicted ! I say it *is* murder to drive through a village at the speed of an express train ! Between two warning-boards asking motorists to proceed slowly. Without even sounding the hooter, if that is what they call the horrible thing ! . . . Don't tell me this man, if he dies, will not have been murdered !" Her voice grew thin and piercing ; she lifted her stick and pointed with it at the averted profile, handsome as the helmeted Athene-head upon a Corinthian stater, of the girl who sat in the high back seat of the

gorgeous car. "And look at her! Is human life so cheap in her eyes that she can sit up there unmoved, and stare through her veil at the river, and never turn her head, or even change colour? Has she a woman's heart in her, or is she a devil—a cold, cruel devil—dressed up in muslin and silks and furs? . . . My God, it's too horrible! And he may have a wife waiting for him in some cottage near . . . and children . . . My God! my God!"

As the hysterical voice wavered and dragged and broke, and the indignant elderly lady sought refuge in feminine, useless tears, a smile momentarily curved the straight red mouth and arched the finely-cut nostril of the immovable young woman in the motor-car. And a muffled groan, ominous as the distant roar of a coming typhoon, came from the men; and half-a-dozen stalwart figures detached themselves from the group gathered about the unconscious figure that had been carried to the wayside, and very undemonstratively bore down upon and surrounded the sumptuous locomotive. The groan and the simultaneous action appealed to the elderly gentleman and the chauffeur in livery, for they promptly descended from their seats. Possibly had they not done so, they would have been saved the trouble. The door was opened by a groom and an under-gardener. Lehermit, removing the cap, invited the two ladies to descend. The elder of them fluttered down into the road unwillingly enough, the younger stood frowning and hesitating and biting an angry lip.

"We are going to put the man who has been hurt into this car," said Lehermit's usually smooth voice gratingly. "It is necessary that he should be conveyed to the Battleborough Cottage Hospital without delay, or he will certainly bleed to death. My car is too small, for one thing, and, for another, the local police will take more interest than you appear to do in this affair when it is reported

at the Bousford Constabulary Office. May I advise you to get out?"

"We are horribly late already!" Her angry black eyes made fierce war with Lehermit's icy blue ones; her lips were two thin crimson lines bordering her square white teeth. "We are upon our way to meet and pick up a friend—this gentleman's son" (she indicated the elderly man in the fur-lined coat)—"who is returning from a walking-tour through the Thames Valley. He probably reached the Stag Hotel, in Battleborough, about the time when this unfortunate affair occurred. It is more than possible that, not finding the car there waiting as arranged, he will think something is wrong and walk on, tired as he is, to meet us. I suppose you understand that——"

At Lehermit's nod the baggage in the motor-car had been pulled out by a dozen willing hands, and dumped by the roadside.

Lehermit held the car-door invitingly open. He said, grimly: "I quite understand—and you had better get out. Otherwise I shall—assist you, without permission!"

He was ungentlemanly in the extreme, no doubt, as he thus addressed the young lady; but he was at the same time extraordinarily popular with the bystanders; and when a gruff labourer, on the outskirts of the throng, said: "Ah, and serve 'er blooming roight!" there was quite a chorus of assenting voices.

"It is my car!" she said fiercely. "My own car! . . ." But she got down and walked apart, followed by the elderly lady, who offered balm of sympathy in vain. The elderly gentleman in the sealskin-lined coat had been impressed by Lehermit in the service of the sufferer.

"Get in and sit upon the floor," he said, without respect for the garment or the wearer, "and if he slips sideways, steady his legs." A pillow and some towels had been brought up by the croquet-girl, and a jug of water and

a decanter of brandy appeared in the hands of a black-clad butler, who looked unnaturally respectable beside Lehermit and his ominously stained and dusty Samaritans. And then, a gardener in the front seat beside the chauffeur, and Lehermit and a groom supporting the unconscious victim, whose legs were obediently upheld by the elderly gentlemen in the fur-lined coat, the 30 h.p. motor-car moved smoothly away, gathered speed, and, with a warning toot-toot of horn, sped noiselessly and swallow-swift towards Battleborough, five miles distant, and the crowd thinned and melted. . . . The girl and her friend in flannels went back to the villa croquet-ground, the housemaid departed on her errand, and the elderly lady went on with her companion. . . . I stood in the dust, and kicked something that chinked. It was the broken bull's-eye of the near lamp, a crystal bubble half an inch thick, shattered by impact with the victim's head. I picked a bit up and looked at it, standing beside that ugly puddle on the road. Then a man came up and joined me, and, looking up, I gasped ; for it was the fresh-faced young groom who had sat beside Lehermit. There was his round face, his white tie, his wasp-striped livery waist-coat, the tweed coat and shooting-breeches—discarded integuments of Lehermit's—the brown leggings and neat shoes. His explanation was simple enough. He had got down on the near side, intending "to run round her bonnet," cross the road, and open the yard-gates. But the great 30 h.p. automobile had leapt on him, and he only had time to throw himself back against the unlatched gate of the villa garden. It had swung back with his weight, he had fallen into a clump of broom-bushes, knocking the sense out of himself against a forgotten pile of bordering-tiles for einder-paths. There was an ugly bruise on his temple to support the assertion. But who, then, was the man who had been hurt ? Lehermit's groom had not the

least idea. He had seen him step out from the right-hand side of the road as the great car rushed towards him, throwing up his hand as though to signal or warn the driver.

"A man of about my 'ighth . . . a gentleman, I should say ; dressed in grey tweed coat and breeches and brown gaiters, same as, or very much the same as, them I'm wearing now. He carried a stick," said the fresh-faced groom, "and had a small valise or knapsack seemin'ly strapped high on his shoulders. I see the line of it above 'em, as he signalled to the choffore with 'is stick ; and there the stick is, high up in that pollard willow by the Ashlees' fence." Why had he signalled ? My throat grew drier, and my heart thumped, apparently at the bottom of it, as Lehermit's groom nimbly climbed the fence and brought down the stick. It was rather a fashionable stick, light and springy, of black West African swamp-root, with a crested silver plate upon the crook-end, and some initials—"A. E. F. to J. De'H."—with a recent date. Who was the injured man, injured so hideously, rendered so unrecognizable that Lehermit had gone in with him to the Cottage Hospital believing him to be none other than his own servant ? Could it be that the magnificent, recklessly-driven car had been the instrument of vengeance ? Vengeance on the callous nature and the unpitying soul of a proud, selfish woman, who, hurrying on the wings of speed to meet her lover, had felled and crushed by the roadside no common hireling justly despised by her, no vulgar groom, unworthy, even in his mortal anguish, of a pitying word or glance from her ; but her own beloved. . . . Down the road, borne on the wings of a cold, uprising wind, came at that instant a terrible cry. And I knew that she knew, and that it was he, before she came running to me, a frantic, white-faced, wild-eyed woman, with his dusty, broken-strapped valise in her hand, stam-

mering with bleached lips ! " It is his ! . . . it was he ! . . . we were to be married . . . next month. Oh, take me to him. . . . For the love of God ! Have pity. . . . Have pity, as I had not ! "

We requisitioned Lehermit's car—left, you will remember, standing by the roadside. The groom drove, and we got to the Cottage Hospital just in time. I have been told that she thinks he knew her before he died, but the Matron and the Head Surgeon are not so certain. Nothing seems stranger to Lehermit than his having threatened *her* to make her get out and make room for *him*. That his father held his legs without knowing who he was until the patient reached the Hospital, Lehermit regards as counting one for the old gentleman. He regards it as likely that the owner of the magnificent 30 h.p. Mercédes will be less keen on automobiling after this. But human nature is capable of strange developments, and it might turn out quite the other way after all.

## VI

## A CHINTZ-COVERED CHAIR

MRS. LINDOW BROEKSMA, widow of a wealthy Boer farmer and ex-member of the Raad, an undeniably beautiful woman of forty, who, twenty-four years previously, had been Kate Carlingford, the beauty of a single brief London season, stood on the stoep of the Orange Vale farmhouse, a solid wooden building of the old Dutch type, painted green and white, with red doors and chimneys, and a rusty gilt weathercock; and, with her fair and comely face shaded from the scorching spring sunshine by a big Boer bonnet of roughly-plaited straw, looked forth above the Cape jessamine and wistaria-wreathed balustrade, over the carefully tended and pretty flower-garden, across the low-lying peach-orchards and the groves where green fruit and white perfumed blossom hung in profusion on the orange-trees, to the scrub-covered foot-slopes of the mountains. High on her right rose the peaks of the giant ranges towards the burning blue African sky, a narrow defile made a dark, crooked line on the stony grey-green some ten miles away, vanishing midway behind a bristling *chevaux de frise* of jagged rocks, reappearing at the base of the mountain to open funnel-wise where the boulders of the river-drift showed above the shrunken, sluggishly crawling current. Upon the woman's left hand rose a line of kopjes of varying size—the lower and more distant bare and naked, those nearer crowned with bushy scrub of aloe, cactus, and prickly-pear, the largest and midmost commanding the drift, and the fan-shaped mouth of the

defile, like a fort built by Nature's hands; and beyond the menacing line of kopjes spread the veldt, its flowering grasses drying in the fierce sun-rays. Near and far, not a human being stirred upon the face of the landscape. Only Nomalie, the Kaffir scullery-girl, crawled over the whitened bricks of the stoep, renewing their chastity of hue from a shallow pan of whitening with a rag dabber.

The hand that held the well-used, leather-covered field-glass through which Mrs. Broeksma had been scanning the landscape, was strong and firm and white, if splashed here and there upon its smoothness with golden freckles. The figure revealed by her plain black gown was of noble proportions; on the column-like throat that rose from her superb shoulders poised a stately head, the plentiful gold-brown hair had scarcely a thread of white, the matronly beauty of the calm features was as yet unmarred by line or wrinkle. Before the simple directness of her blue-grey eyes, many a Boer, religiously ready to marry, love, and cherish a wealthy widow, had found his courage vanish and his budding hopes wilt. So Kate Broeksma had remained unwooed. Now she looked forth south and west, scanning the huge, beetling mountain-slopes in vain for a sign of coming strife.

"I see nothing, even with the glass. Gertha Kells must have been mistaken!"

There was a slight sound, like a dry chuckle, close to Mrs. Broeksma's knees. The Kaffir girl sat up on her projecting yellow heels, stretched out a spare, childish arm, and pointed over the balcony. The knotty black finger indicated the midmost point in the defile, where a restless cloud of tiny birds quivered in the blinding light. She only grunted, but her mistress understood.

"The birds on the mountain, Nomalie—they would all be sheltering in the thick bushes at this time of day, but

that something in the kloof disturbs them—is not that what you mean?"

"*Yebo,*" assented Nomalie, nodding vigorously. Then a clear, shrill whistle, like an owl's cry, sounded from the rear of the still homestead, and the tall, black figure in the big Boer sunbonnet was gone from the stoep into the house directly.

"It is the young Baas!" muttered Nomalie, and fell to afresh at her task of whitening the bricks.

Meanwhile, in the great room behind the verandah, where the wonderful Dutch dresser stood, with its load of ancient Delft, every piece bearing the priceless signature of De Boot and De Romeyn,—and the high Dutch stove of gilt and painted tiles, standing on the skin of the black-maned lion, shot by the dead husband and father, tried to stare the English cottage-piano and rosebud chintz-covered easy chairs out of countenance, Mrs. Broeksma held her son to her heart. Lindow Broeksma the second was a tall, lean, unkempt young Boer, whose sandy hair hung in tangled clumps, and whose long, sunburnt jaws were decorated by irregular patches of youthful beard of more than reddish hue. Premature lines of hardship were round his keen, grey-blue eyes, his long, sagacious nose was badly sun-roasted, and, having long ago shed the ordinary civilian shooting-tweeds and gaiters in which he had ridden forth to the service of his country, he was attired in a well-worn suit of British Army khaki, with a Sam Browne belt, boots, and putties. On the left breast of the tunic was a powder-blackened, red-edged hole, the portal through which the soul of the original wearer, announced a sergeant of the Lancashire Fusiliers by the lettering on the collar and the stripes upon the sleeves, had made exit. And the felt slouch hat had been shorn by a bullet of its hackles. His bandolier was thoroughly crammed with cartridges, he was armed with a six-shooter,

and carried a well-kept, well-used Mauser rifle, with an oily red-spotted handkerchief tied over the breech.

"Donder ! mother, don't cry, there is no time for that," he said with a hasty kiss. " You can see for yourself I'm sound, wind and limb, and hard as nails. What's wanted is fresh meat or salted beef, biltong and bread, and tobacco and dop, if you have it ! for twenty fellows on the middle kopje there — 'Coetzee's Kopje,' as we used to call it, after old Oom Jan Coetzee got bitten to death by a snake there. Is our commando far away, do you ask ? Ay ! the commando is pretty far away, thirty-five miles as the crow flies, across country. Three hundred tough kerels with plenty of meat and drink, but wanting ammunition for our two big guns and the pom-pom. We should have had cartridges and powder by this ; the commandant has sent messenger after messenger to headquarters, but none of them have come back. Perhaps the rooitbaajes have got them. You know that, the duyvels' tents are as white as snow about Pretoria, and our Oom Paul has gone across the frontier. Olivier is with three thousand Afrikanders in the Orange Free State, and Botha—that is a man, Alamachtig !—holds the Transvaal in the hollow of his hand. Wait a bit, mother, and you will see ! We will drive these verdoemte rooineks like sheep ; we will slaughter them and take their skins, and South Africa will be for the Boers again !"

The young field-cornet smiled pleasantly upon Mrs. Broeksma, disclosing a set of excellent but uncared-for teeth. He tapped his well-stuffed bandolier, with a wink to the overseer—a short, square old Boer, in an ancient suit of corduroys hanging in heavy folds like the skin of a hippopotamus.

"We aren't so badly off for cartridges, our little lot," he said, with his rather sinister grin. "We called in at Dirk Peter's homestead, and drank his dop and took his

money, and found these buried in the barn along with it ; and then we tied the old man up to his waggon-pole, and gave him three dozen with the sjambok to teach him to avail himself of the next Englander proclamation, and throw down his roer and go back to his farm when better men are fighting ! "No, I can't stay, except for a drink. Bring a bottle of Old Squareface, Oom Gertha, and then I'm going back to the boys on Coetzee's Kopje."

"Why must they be posted on that kopje ? The snakes are dangerous, and there is no fear of a surprise, is there ?" Mrs. Broeksma asked anxiously.

"There is no fear of a surprise," said the young field-cornet arrogantly, "but there may be danger of one. The rooineks have moved out from Pretoria ; our scouts tell us that a Division and two brigades of their cavalry have been brought up from Volksrust through Ermelo to Carolina, and that there's another cavalry division pushing over the mountains straight for Barberton. Down the big Deerdskop Sluit there is their best way in dry weather, unless they're verdoemte fools ! Well, when they come pouring out of the bottom of the funnel they'll find us waiting for them by the drift. Wacht ein bietje—you'll see business then !"

He tossed off a glass of Schiedam, sitting on a wooden stool he had used as a child, and keeping a rifle between his knees, and the heart of Kate Broeksma went cold with fear.

"But if there is fighting, Lindow," the mother's voice trembled. "You may—you might—be killed !" Her arms went out to the young man as though he were a child ; there was infinite tenderness, mingled with terror and distress, in the face she turned to him. "Against so many as are coming, what could twenty-one Boers do ?"

"We'll show you what twenty-one Boers can do, fast enough. And sure it is somebody will get killed. But

why me more than any other fellow ?" Lindow chuckled, slapping the rifle-breech. " Hoe ! Nomalie wench, what are you saying there ?"

For a small black figure, with bristling hair-plaits and a pink-striped cotton pinafore, stood on the threshold of the glazed window-door opening on the veranda. "*The rooineks—the rooineks are coming down from the mountain!*" she jabbered in her guttural Kaffir-Dutch.

Mrs. Broeksma was beside Nomalie in an instant. The clouds of frightened birds had ceased to rise and hover above the dark, jagged line of the defile made by the dry bed of the Deerdskop torrent. The scene of their agitation was nearer the mountain's base. And, as the woman looked, from the mouth of the stony funnel came riding a straggling body of lean, tanned, ragged men on worn and jaded horses ; and her pale cheek grew red, as a clear, crisp voice, unmistakably English and unmistakably the voice of a gentleman, travelled to her ears across the burning distancee, uttering a single word of command.

Then from the room behind her came a whisper in her son's voice, " English cavalry ?" and as she nodded, glaneing over her shoulder : " How many men ?"

She counted fifteen.

" Wait a bit," came the thick whisper. " Perhaps there are more in the slut there !"

But she waited, and no more came out. No more might be expected to come out, had she known it, for at least an hour.

That famous cavalry regiment, the Dapple Grey Hussars, for a twelvemonth past had served under General Paris in all parts of South Africa. Fighting, skirmishing, bivouacking, marching day after day in good weather and bad weather, with hardly a single break in the monotony of vigorous service, the regiment had come out on top of despatches without one black smudge upon its

gallant record. Therefore, when the strategical pursuit of what remained of the Boer army was organized upon a grand scale, and the British forces, spread out on a front of fifty miles, marched left, right, and centre, to the final discomforture of Botha, the word went forth from the mouth of He Who Had To Be Obeyed that the Dapple Grey Hussars should form the advance guard of Paris's and Bulton's Division. And as between sickness, casualty, and fatality, the entire strength of the gallant regiment named numbered but a hundred mounted men of all ranks. the remnant of Squadron A. supplying Advanced Reconnaissance for the main body, made rather a sorry show, to the inexperienced eye.

"Twenty of us against fifteen of them," said the thick whisper, stirring the soft, fine loose hair upon Mrs. Broeksma's white neck. "Hals Berter is in command while I'm absent. Will he tell the boys to fire? Maybe they won't wait for him to tell them—they don't get a chance of shooting dirty English schelms every day! Zwijs! they're crossing the drift. Now would be the chance for the boys. Donder! they've crossed without being potted, and they're heading for here. Going to pay us a call, perhaps. Curse them, so they are!"

The mother's eyes were full of fear. "Hide! oh, hide!" her white lips whispered, as the overseer burst into the room.

"No, Baas, you cannot escape by the baek!" Oom Gertha gasped. "Half of the rooitbaajes have ridden round that way, the rest are riding up the orange-avenue. Try one of the mevrouw's cupboards, or get inside a feather bed. To fight and die is brave, but to be alive is better, the dear Lord knows!"

Two strong white hands caught Oom Gertha Kells by the collar, pushing him imperiously from the room.

"Go down, go down and parley with the English soldiers," said the voice of Mrs. Broeksma in his ear. "Leave it to

me to hide my son where they shall not find him. Keep them out of this room if you may ; if you cannot, we must risk it. Go !”

“ I don’t see how you can——” began Broeksma, as his mother turned upon him, a woman transformed—vibrating with nervous force and strung to desperate effort. “ Better let me jump from the stoep and run for it. Our fellows will——”

She tore the voluminous cover from a high-backed, armless marquetry chair, and pointed to the four-legged stool from which her son had risen. “ You shall not risk it ! I forbid you ! Are you not all I have ? Sit on the stool, quick, and hold up your hands on a level with your head. Don’t you remember the trick you played as a boy on your Cousin Gertrudis ? Have you forgotten——”

He had not—and instantly obeyed her.

When Major Hawting and Lieutenant the Hon. Tommy Gregory, followed by Squadron-Sergeant Kennett and an orderly, were ushered by the perspiring overseer of the Orange Vale Farm into the presence of the mistress, she was sitting, very calm and upright, on a chintz-covered, high-backed chair, engaged upon a piece of cambric embroidery. Very nimbly the white fingers manipulated the shining needle, very proudly and gravely the white lids lifted as the spurs jingled at the threshold.

“ May I ask,” asked the Boer farmwife, in cultured, perfect English, “ to what we owe the unexpected honour of this visit ?”

Lieutenant Gregory heard the Major whisper under his breath a word or two. He did not distinguish their meaning, or he would have stared with even rounder eyes. “ My God, it’s Kate Carlingford !” the Major had muttered. If Mrs. Broeksma had quivered and started, pierced by the lance of recognition on her side, it was only known to the chair she sat upon.

With only a passing hesitation, the Major explained. Under the terms of the Commander-in-Chief's proclamation issued in the month of May, many militant Boers had abandoned the commandos of the partisan leaders and returned to their farms. Upon a marked map which the officer produced, and showed the lady, the position of the Orange Vale farmhouse was marked by a black cross, the present occupation of its master indicated by the red-ink letters "S. I. A." Still In Arms. He begged permission to warn her that the proclamation was now rescinded, and that all Boers taken in the act militant must become prisoners of war.

"Thank you, we shall not forget," said Mrs. Broeksma, looking straight at the Major with a pleasant smile. "My son is at present away from home, staying with some relatives at Barberton, to one of whom—a charming girl, and my niece by marriage—he is engaged. I will give him the information when I write" (she deliberately cut off a thread); "though in the disturbed state of the country it is difficult to get letters through."

"And in the meanwhile, if you have any firearms or ammunition in the house, or upon the premises," hinted the courteous Major, "you will, of course, not object to deliver them to us, the country being at present under martial law!"

"With pleasure, Major," said Mrs. Broeksma, bowing courteously from her chair; "but, except an old elephant-rifle of my poor husband's and a revolver I keep by me for protection, there is nothing in that way. Of course, the overseer has a gun and a revolver of his own; no doubt you will use your own methods of persuasion with him!" Her lip curled a little.

"Kindly withdraw for a moment, Lieutenant Gregory," said the Major, turning keen, sea-blue eyes upon the Hon. Tommy, who was winking vigorously at his commanding

officer in the effort to indicate something that was lying on the centre-table, "and take the sergeant and the orderly with you."

The Lieutenant marched out his men. The door closed on the jingling of spurs. Then the bronzed, haggard, bristly-chinned Major in his patched Service khaki, fringed and ragged putties, and dilapidated boots, walking very lightly, with long, even steps, moved to the table, and took from it a Mauser rifle with a red-spotted handkerchief tied over the breech.

"Your son or some other armed Boer is in this house, Mrs. Broeksma," the Major said very distinctly. "Here is his rifle, the stock still hot from the sun. Here is the glass he has been drinking from. There are Boers in ambush in the neighbourhood, we know, and this man is of their number. God knows, if—if it is any one dear to you, my utmost influence shall be used for his protection. I ask you only to trust me, if it is as I believe!"

She wavered, almost imperceptibly, for the merest breath of a whisper from underneath the rosebud chintz had warned her, "NO!" She had been pale before, but she was white to the lips now. "If you believe this, and that any person is hidden here, sir, search and make sure."

The Major went to the door and gave a rapid order. Thenceforwards the heavy footsteps of men were heard about the house. The Major came back. The lady went on working. After a pause, she spoke :

"This is very different from Stanhope Gate, is it not, Mr.—Major Hawting, I should say?"

"It is," agreed the Major. "But you are not so very unlike the Miss Carlingford I used to visit there. Time has been kind to you, Mrs. Broeksma, indeed!"

"Do not stand; please sit down while your men are going through the formality of searching the house," said Mrs. Broeksma, almost with a smile.

The Major thanked her, and preferred to lean against the table, folding his arms, in an attitude she remembered well.

"Those were dear, happy days at Stanhope Gate," said Mrs. Broeksma, with a softening in her tone that corresponded with the softening in her glance, "and I have often wished that I could—thank you for them."

"You did so when you bade me good-bye," said the Major, with stiff lips, "twenty-four years ago."

"Ah, but I mean more gratefully, and more warmly," said the widow. "When we are as young as I was then we are selfish. We take everything for granted. All kindness, all devotion—"

"All *love*," said the Major, and closed his lips upon the word. A flush came into Mrs. Broeksma's cheeks, and her bosom rose and fell in an agitated way.

"I have felt for many years that I owed you some explanation of what may have seemed ingratitude and—heartlessness," she said quickly. "When I was hurriedly summoned back from England to the Transvaal, it was to find my father a ruined and a dying man. He had one friend who stood by him, a man of his own age—they had been friends from boyhood. And that man—loved me: and my father said: 'If you wish me to die in peace, put your hand in Lindow Broeksma's, and let me see you married to him before I go.' " Her voice faltered. "What else could I do but obey him?"

There was a flush on the Major's face now, and a new light in the stern eyes. "Kate—!" he cried, and took a long stride towards her. "Kate—!"

"Oh, hush!" she said, and then could have bitten her tongue out. But the Major went on.

"Mrs. Broeksma, you are no longer a wife, and I must speak, unless you silence me. I loved you twenty-four years ago,—I have never ceased to love you!—I never shall cease—not being the kind of man to change easily—unless

some Boer bullet has the power to annihilate thought and consciousness with the mere taking of a man's life. And I believe the other thing, you know, though I'm no theologian!"

There was a knock at the door. Lieutenant the Hon. Tommy Gregory stepped in, and saluted the senior officer.

"I beg to report, sir, that there are no Boers concealed upon the premises."

"Very well, Gregory. You have searched everywhere?"

"Everywhere, sir," said the Lieutenant, "except this room." His round eyes roved curiously about the apartment.

"Mount and make ready for marching," the Major said to the Lieutenant. "I'll join you in a moment more!"

"There's one other thing, Major," said the Lieutenant. "The five men you detached to go up that bush-topped middle kopje report it swarming with snakes, and two dead Boers lying in the scrub. Private Hogg is bitten, and they've ligatured above the bite, cut the piece out, dosed him with whisky and ammonia, and are walking him up and down."

The Lieutenant clattered out and jingled along the passage and down the wooden steps that led from the hall-door.

The Major took a long stride back into the middle of the room.

"This life is full of chances, Kate!" The name broke from him almost with a cry, and the man's hands stretched out towards her almost involuntarily. "We met first by chance. It was a chance our meeting again. If I have the shadow of a chance of winning what I have longed for all these years, only rise and come to me, and put your hands in mine. I ask no words, only for this! Will you not do it?"

"*If you do it,*" said the whisper from under the rosebud chintz, "*I will shoot him dead before your eyes, and myself before they can take me!*"

"Will you not do this?" asked the Major; and she answered with a tortured sob:

"I cannot! It is impossible!"

There was a silence. The deep, hurried breathing of three people where only two appeared to be, seemed to Mrs. Broeksma to fill the room, and clamorously invite suspicion. But at last the Major bowed and turned away. Then spurs jingled down the wooden steps, there was a scraping of horses' hoofs upon the gravel, and at a signal from Nomalie that the rooineks had ridden on, Mrs. Broeksma rose up from the chintz-covered chair.

"I was a verdoemte fool not to remember about the snakes on that kopje," said the angry voice of young Broeksma, as he freed himself from his recent ambush and stretched his stiffened limbs, "and I wonder how many of our Transvaalers are dead, and where the other fellows are hiding? As for you, you're an Englishwoman, and no Boer's vrouw, and I know now whose is the photograph you used to keep in a locket when I was a child, and kiss and cry over sometimes——"

"Lindow!" she uttered angrily.

"When you thought nobody was looking. Deny, if you dare, that if you hadn't been sitting on my knee you'd have gone to him—that long-legged, hatchet-faced schelm, and put your hands in his as he asked! And if you got the chance again——"

Three rifle-shots cracked in the distance. A return volley nearer at hand woke the sleeping echoes of the mountain. The Kaffir girl, Nomalie, cried out from the stoep in a shrill, triumphant voice.

"I can save my breath to blow my coffee," said young Broeksma, showing his discoloured teeth in an unpleasant smile. "You'll never get the chance again. They've shot your English lover!"

## VII

### “ ROUGE GAGNE !”

LADY HONORIA, Freddy's mother—Freddy was the Detrimental whose undistinguished career closed in the episode I am to relate—Freddy's mother was a fragile, rose-cheeked, golden-locked beauty when Freddy's father, whom Freddy was afterwards to know as a melancholy misogynist, led her, in the height of an Early Victorian Season, to the altar of St. George's, Hanover Square. Seven years have sped since Freddy, aged twenty-five, youngest of six, quitted a Northern Negridan swamp for the Other Side of Things ; and I saw Lady Honoria driving in the Park but yesterday, and she is a fragile, rose-cheeked, golden-haired beauty still, who profits by the newest fashion in hats to wear three veils, and looks the better for it.

Lady Honoria always believed in painting the lily, and it was at the maternal knee that Freddy laid in the extensive store of preeocious and peculiar knowledge which served him to draw upon in after-life. At an age when his round, innocent eyes were barely on a level with the edge of Lady Honoria's toilet-table, Freddy was able to tracce each allurement of feminine beauty to its source. He knew that pink cheeks came out of a little, rose-decked cardboard box, that pink nails were kept in a tiny china pot, that red lips were made out of one tiny bottle, and lovely black eyelashes came out of another. He drew blue diagrams on his chubby arms with vein-peneils, and eradicated imaginary wrinkles from his innocent snub-nose with miniature garden-rollers of ivory. And one of the

chief articles of his infant creed was that *blanc-de-perle* must be dabbed on and allowed to dry before you apply the powder-puff, and another that all grown-up ladies wore little pillows sewn inside their frocks and slept in slices of raw veal, and chamois-leather gloves full of little holes and anointed with choice unguents. Far, far preferable to the legitimate delights of the flogged rocking-horse or the beaten hoop was the silent ecstasy of watching his mother's hair, hanging loosely over her white peignoir, put off the appearance of damp seaweed and assume the glory of Venetian gold, under the transmuting rays of London sunshine, discreetly filtered through the lace blinds of her boudoir. The boy taught his tutor much more than he learned from that functionary, and when he went to Eton, could have passed an examination in all the latest and most scientific methods by which the precariously-held territory of feminine loveliness is fortified and defended against the invasions of the arch-enemy Time.

Neither at Eton nor at Sandhurst—for Master Freddy was destined to defend his country—did he allow his love of study to interfere with recreation, nor were his recreations of the aggressively athletic kind. In College theatricals he shone ; combining the responsibilities of stage-manager, the duties of stage-carpernter, the rôle of leading lady, and the part of principal burlesque girl. No country-house charade, no bazaar *tableau vivant*, could get along *sans* Freddy. Previous to a faney ball—and soon after Freddy joined the 1st Battalion of the “Wessex Wonders,” that distinguished territorial regiment efflor esced in a dazzling series of these delightful entertainments—previous to a fancy ball no subaltern was ever in greater request. With his pockets bulging with the little pots, boxes, and bottles, familiar to him from earliest infancy, with patches loose in his waistcoat-pocket, and eye-pencils

behind his ear, the fair-haired, slim-waisted, blue-eyed, innocent-looking youth would fly here, there, and everywhere, advising, entreating, commanding, persuading, admiring, in a breath. Questions the most delicate were submitted to Freddy for decision. A very limited amount of parade, drill, gymnastics, and musketry sufficed to nourish his professional enthusiasm ; but of drinking weak tea and smoking cigarettes in overheated boudoirs, of helping their owners to choose their hats and match their chiffons, Freddy was never weary. He preferred fashions to tactics, and could discuss them by the hour. The length or width of the skirt, the cut of a sleeve, the latest colour, the newest gait in walking, the latest method of shaking hands, the latest shades in hair and skin, were subjects upon which Freddy was an authority. He adored the society of women, and was petted and caressed to his heart's content by the daughters, wives, and sisters of his brother-officers. His mother simply worshipped him. Did he not counsel her in corsets and create her coiffures ? And the ladies of the rank-and-file were, to a woman, on Freddy's side. It was rumoured that during an inspection of the Married Quarters he had been discovered teaching Mrs. Corporal McKenna how to turn and remodel a last year's toque. A quiet command of scathing repartee, a cool delight in devilry, distinguished him from the mere effeminate fribble ; he played whist like an expert and polo like a Persian. He sang the latest ballad or music-hall ditty in a little, agreeable light tenor voice ; was an admirable mimic and vamper of an accompaniment. And men, like women, sought him for information touching the newest craze and the latest fad of fashion. Had bridge been invented in the palmy days of Freddy, had “ kickapoo ” or “ ju-jitsu ” flowered into life, with what whole-hearted enthusiasm he would have devoted himself to these engrossing pastimes ! Now he lies in a Northern

Negridan swamp, where the blue-bodied, red-legged crane catches little snakes all day, and the honey-bird cries ceaselessly “ *Seeker ! Seeker !* ” over the bones of one who never seemed to seek anything but the portion of the idler.

As to the godless act of irreverent presumption culminating in the scandal that sent Freddy out to Northern Negrida, it cannot be denied that Freddy—Freddy, the Dictator of the regimental boudoirs, the unanimously elected *arbiter elegantiarum* who chose hats and matched chiffons, and made up complexions to harmonize with fancy-ball costumes—Freddy assisted the wife of the Senior Major, a stout lady of rigid morals, to put on her wig ! Nay, there are some who hint that this twentieth-century Actæon, this Peeping Tom who got so deservedly sent to Coventry, assisted at the rite of lacing ! “ But where there is no waist, can there be stays ? ” as one of Freddy’s feminine defenders afterwards demanded. Certainly the lowermost and most voluminous of the Senior Major’s wife’s three chins merged in billows of adipose personality, confined, in the conjectural regions of the ceinture, by an invisible string. She was a woman of the type known as “ imposing,” proud of her family, her fat, her husband, and several other things no one else would have bragged about. She had a withering eye, and was a crusher by profession, but Freddy declined either to be withered or crushed. Obstinacy like this infallibly drives women of the type of the Senior Major’s wife to despair or strong measures. She chose the strong measures, and issued a ukase forbidding the owners of the regimental boudoirs to open their doors to “ that horrid, lisping little dandy ! ”

“ You treat the creature, all of you, as if he were a pet poodle ! ” snorted the indignant lady. “ Allow him to dictate to you—wear whatever he pleases——”

“ If I wore what pleased a pet poodle best,” observed a lady who really possessed one, “ it would be nothing but a

railway rug.” But upon her the Senior Major’s wife turned a cold shoulder. She was with difficulty diverted from the war-path by a particular friend of Freddy’s, who knew she was in need of a reliable lady’s-maid—a paragon who could do everything and wanted next to nothing. She thought she had heard of such a prodigy, much to the joy of the Major’s wife.

Now, when the Senior Major’s wife was dressing for dinner that very evening, a young person bearing credentials from a local Registry Office was reported to be in waiting, and was admitted to the sacred precincts of the Senior Majoress’s dressing-room. She seemed a slim, demure, fair-haired, pink-cheeked young person, closely veiled and habited in modest black, and the Senior Major’s wife quite took to her at first sight. On being asked whether she could dress hair she offered proof of her abilities on the spot, and, after some hemming, a mysterious cardboard box containing—dare we hint what?—being produced, she manipulated the transformation-coiffure it contained to admiration, added an exiguous touch or two to the eyebrows and complexion of its owner, and, with a respectful curtsey, quitted the room.

“ I shall engage her—I shall certainly engage her,” murmured the stout lady, “ if her references are as reliable as she says!” And, with a complacent smile at her own embellished reflection in the dressing-table glass, she tore open the envelope supposedly containing the address of the paragon. Then she rent the air with shrieks, and tore off her waves and fringes, and became, on the instant, a very plain, very hot, very furious Senior Majoress. For Freddy and the demure candidate for the post of lady’s-maid were one, as the pencilled lines upon his card intimated. And the result was a grand *émeute*—a scandal royal—and Freddy exchanged.

Not into an Indian Regiment, to become the glory of garrison theatricals, the victim of the ubiquitous bearer, and the slave of the restless rupee. He exchanged into a West African Frontier Corps, with the rank of Captain, and went out to join the —th Bausa Rifles, garrisoned at a station on the Lower Negra, and charged with the duty of maintaining the prestige of the British Empire in a palm-oil, ivory, and caoutchouc-producing coast region recently secured by treaty with a native dignitary resident in an un-explored region of the interior (a gentleman known, unless memory errs, as the Banga, in sinister repute as a practiser of ju-ju and collector of human skulls), and placed under an Imperial Commissioner appointed by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The Protectorate was announced in the *Pink Tape Gazette* upon the very date that saw the publication of indignant paragraphs in several dailies respecting the Banga’s disregard of the most important clauses of a treaty bearing the large black seal and signatory ink-smudge of the potentate’s thumb.

To convince him of the folly of coquetting with other Powers, a British Expedition was to ascend the Negra, quit that river at a certain point, penetrate the unexplored interior, occupy the conjectural capital of the Banga country, enforce a moral, and adorn a tale. Fifteen hundred lean, slim-shanked Mohammedan Bausas, officered by five Englishmen and attended by the usual complement of carriers, constituted the Expedition, which was nominally led by Captain Freddy, really by his Lieutenant, a grey-headed, melancholy oldster, with the leather skin and the muddy eyeball that betoken a constitution seasoned by many fevers—blackwater fever, swamp fever, fly fever, yellow fever, and dysentery—to endure the exigencies of the climate. And the Lieutenant looked with mild, remote interest at Freddy’s beautiful japanned bath-tub, borne on the head of one native, while another carried his silver-gilt

toilet-apparatus in its travelling-case. He understood and appreciated luxury, never starting on any mission without a change of flannels and a worn-out hairbrush, but he knew nothing of luxury like this. His cosmetics were carbolic ointment, vaseline, and mustard plasters ; his philtres quinine and chlorodyne ; his nostrums several native applications good for guinea-worm and chigoes, boils, and other local demonstrations of the effervescent activity of Nature under a West African sun.

And in a West African fog, as the Expedition, quitting the boats of loose planks artlessly secured by ropes of reed in which it had made its voyage up to Abao, ploughed through the moist black clay which was a little later to become slimy, adhesive, black mud—for the start had thoughtfully been arranged so that the return must be made in the rainy season—Freddy, looking back at the long, snaky trail, became used to the appearance of an apparently endless procession of sweating, shiny faces, floating apparently bodiless on a low sea of crawling white vapour. He learned to discern between the bite of the mosquito and the tsetse-fly, and to doubt the efficacy of cold-cream in either case. He learned to know a monkey-bread tree from a fan-palm, and how many needles will buy a calabash of native corn-pudding or a pot of sour milk. Later on he learned that all the silver dollars of the Slave Coast or the nuggets of the Gold Coast will not buy food when it is not there. The slimy, green vegetation, the coarse, breast-high grasses, vanished before the eyes of the Expedition under the onslaughts of huge black grub-worms and yellow beetles, and the Expedition ate these, before very long, and were grateful. Freddy, dividing a small tin of French asparagus with the Lieutenant, sighed as he thought of the mess *menus* that he had condemned as gross, and grew more wasp-waisted every day. But he never neglected his toilet. His nails were as irreproachable, his neat moustache as well

waxed, his smoothly-shaven cheeks as pink and white as in the days of old, before that onslaught on the Proprieties, united in the person of the Senior Major's wife. . . . And the jungle closed up behind the Expedition every weary, hungry, footsore night, and opened out before it every stiff, aching, blear-eyed morning. But they were getting nearer to the Banga, and when, at the end of a banyan avenue tastefully hung with the choicest human curios belonging to that dignitary's collection, they saw the conical mud roofs of his palace-town and the wattled reed-screens of his fortifications, they raised a croaking cheer and sent the Maxim forward.

But the Banga did not require the Maxim, he explained, with volubility, when the leaders of the Expedition confronted him in his own courtyard. Sitting on a native cricket, under a palm-shed, with a theatrically gorgeous drapery of brocade wrapped about his gross body, weighed down with many pounds of barbaric ivory and savage gold, he was ready to append his thumb-seal to another treaty, to any number of treaties ; to bow his shiny bullet-head beneath the rebuke of his elder brother, the Great White King of England, and to give his word never to do that which he ought not to do, or leave undone that which ought not to be left undone again ! He was ready to give up coquetting with Foreign Powers, to give up ju-ju, to give the chiefs of his great white brother every satisfaction in his power ; he was ready, able, and willing to fill them and their followers with assurances, protestations, flatteries—but not with food ! The grubs had eaten up the plantains, the rats had got at the granaries built in the trees, the cows were bewitched and gave no milk. The Banga and his people were starving, themselves. . . . By the light of his burning museum of human relics—for the Great White King had insisted upon this punitive measure being carried out—the Banga watched the gaunt Expedition

depart, setting their fever-drawn and hunger-pined faces to the Great Black River from whence they had come. And, if Bangas ever chuckle, the Banga chuckled as the dripping jungle swallowed up the last trail of the slow-moving, baggage-laden centipede. Then he went in, with renewed relish, for ju-ju again ; and sacrificed slaves, goats, and white cocks *ad libitum* in honour of the personage who had helped him to play off that little joke on his Great White English Brother.

And the Expedition waded along under the dripping branches, under the low, grey, pouring skies, tripping over tangled tree-roots, squelching through black morasses that grew deeper every day. Nature liquefied under that down-pour—without and within. Men dropped upon their knees like rotted sheep and gave up the ghost. Men battled on in a dumb ecstasy of wretchedness, their hollow eyes set vacantly and their leathery mouths full of grass or leaves. They had hungered and famished before, they were starving now. Some of them had died previously, now all were dying. All would have died, falling unnoticed out of the lagging column to right and left upon the plashy trail, but for one beacon of hope that never failed. It shone in the face of the Leader of the Expedition. To the Africans, only six hundred strong now, there was something stimulatingly uncanny in the unchanging, never-fading red and white of Freddy’s dazzling complexion, shaded by the rags of a blue mosquito-veil and a battered solar topi. God was great ! said the Bausas, and every man’s destiny was written on his forehead, and it seemed to them that upon the Captain’s might be deciphered signs indicating deliverance for those who followed where he led. To the English —only three of them remaining—those rose-and-lily cheeks, those healthfully crimson lips, perhaps told another tale ! and when the Leader of the Expedition crawled out of his tattered remnant of a tent each morning, and the dressing-

case (invariably his pillow) was restrapped and balanced for the day's march upon the head of the strongest carrier (the bath-tub had been thrown away with the Martinis and the cowrie-sacks long ago), the grey, middle-aged Lieutenant, now white in patches, and bowed and shrunken as with the weight of seventy years, would look preternaturally wise. He had read his Tennyson until the white ants got it, and he knew that honour may stand rooted in dishonour, and that a Captain marching under false colours may yet be staunch to the Flag. He came to this conclusion when the Sergeant-Major died ; and, rising up, a gaunt, living spectre from the side of the worn, wasted body, his eyes met the eyes of the Captain, burning, preternaturally bright with fever, out of that painted red-and-white face, that defied Disease with the hues of health, and paraded Famine in the mask of plenty. And a white, bony, scorching hand gripped his wrist. . . .

“ You've been the real leader of the Expedition all along, Layton, old man,” said Freddy's voice, husky, weak, and rattling in his hollow chest like a pebble in a child's drum. “ I've only held brevet-rank, and kept my end up as well as I could.” He held to the Lieutenant's arm and panted, and the great beads of mingled sweat and rain that ran down his staringly bright cheeks left pinkish smears on the rag of a handkerchief with which he wiped them away. “ Don't think—I can hold out—any longer ! Not been able to shave for—three days ! Sorry—for those poor beggars' sakes !” rattled Freddy, with a glance at the haggard remnant of the Expedition—ninety-three Bausas reduced to skin and bone. “ Bury me where the earth-hogs can't get at me, please ! and—better take my tip, and go on doing as I've done ! I can't think why I brought a theatrical make-up box on this picnic, unless because I'd an idea that the Banga would give a costume-ball in our honour, or because the thing was *meant* ! But, anyhow, it

has helped me to play my part, and now I've spoken the tag, and—the curtain's coming down on the performance! . . .”

The Lieutenant buried Freddy in the swamp, under a mangrove-root where the earth-hogs couldn't get at him. He did not wash those flaring patches of red from the wax-yellow cheeks that bristled with their three days' growth. He succeeded to the command of the Expedition, and the contents of the dressing-case, but he buried that costly, much-battered article with its owner. Also, he brought the remnant of his Bausas back to the garrison-station out of the swamps; upon which the Administrator cabled to the Imperial Commissioner that the Banga had been banged and British prestige maintained; there were paragraphs in the dailies, the illustrated weeklies published drawings by Our Special Artist, made on the spot, and illustrating the burning of the Banga's banyan museum. The Lieutenant got special mention and promotion, and . . . this is a story without a moral. “*Seeker! Seeker!*” cry the honey-birds over Freddy's grave in the swamp; “*not the shadow of one!*”

## VIII

### THE FOURTH VOLUME

WITH a quite genuine gush of pity and sorrow, Alice Fanninghall received an urgent telegraphic summons to the Deershire hunting-box, where a man whose matrimonial proposals she had three times definitely rejected was lying at the point of death.

In brief, severely technical sentences she was told that Major Rollsford Makerson, of the Bay Hussars, had, while hunting with the Letchborough and Downland Foxhounds, been thrown and rolled on by his horse ; had sustained fracture of the spine with lesion ; and so Miss Fanninghall had gratified the desire of a patient certified by two provincial practitioners and an eminent London surgeon and F.R.C.S. as virtually moribund—to have the woman he had hopelessly loved beside him at the last.

It was all so like a play or a story out of a book—the summons, the journey, the arrival, the entry into the darkened chamber where the King of Terrors was soon to reign, the light of rapture in the haggard eyes, the whispered, faltering entreaty : “*Be my wife, my beloved. You'll be my widow—before night!*”—that Alice Fanninghall had been carried away on the high tide of Romance. The parish clergyman had been sent for in hot haste—had hurried through the ceremony that united the living to the dying, and—and—the dying had not died.

They were quite genuine, the tears of gratitude, the thanksgivings addressed to Heaven, with which the new-made bride had received the news that the desperate crisis

was past, that there was a change for the better in the patient's condition : that he might live over the next day ; that he might even last out the week. Then came the intimation that with care, incessant, unsleeping, assiduous, Alice Makerson's husband might be spared for several years to come. She knew herself sincere in her gladness, that her wealth made it possible for Rollsford to have all the luxuries that can alleviate the condition of a helpless invalid.

So several years had gone by. They had worn and sharpened Mrs. Makerson's once rounded outlines, had graven a furrow or two on her white forehead and by her sensitive lips ; had even sowed grey threads through her thick, silky brown hair. But she never owned that she had repented of an act that Makerson's friends and hers had stigmatized as " noble," until the man came whose glance, whose voice, whose touch stabbed her to the heart with the realization of all that she had lost.

You remember Makerson, late of the Bay Hussars ? Makerson, always lying on an invalid couch ; always being hoisted by labour-saving appliances into some new position ; always being massaged, ministered to, dosed, dieted, combed, amused, sympathized with, by his devoted wife ? To do him credit, the Major sang her praises unceasingly. He kissed her white finger-tips when she applied cooling lotions to his brow, or gave him his tonic, or fed him with grapes or bits of quartered orange dipped in port and dusted with sugar. He smoked no cigarettes that were not made by her, wore no wrappers that she had not knitted, read no books except through the medium of her patient, weary eyes and sweet, tired voice—left no word unsaid or overt act undone that could testify to his gratitude to the " Angel of his prison-house," as he fondly called her.

But one thing that Makerson had undertaken to do he left undone. He did not die. And his angel was his

prisoner and he her gaoler. The tragedy begins when they had been married for seven years. She would be thirty, the helpless log, her nominal husband, verging on his fortieth autumn. She had been failing in health of late, the improvement in Makerson was more evident every day. One day, unmarked by any meteorological distinctions setting it apart from other days, brought to the invalid, lying in his luxuriously appointed ground-floor library at their Sloane Street house, the wonderful knowledge that he was going to get well.

Going to get well. . . . The conviction filled Makerson with a swelling sense of coming gladness, with infinite complacency in the thought that Alice was going to reap at last her great, her glorious reward. He believed, this dupe of his own colossal selfishness, that his wife had loved him from the very beginning, had refused him out of coquetry, and had tended him through all their wedded years out of love—out of love. . . .

Now Makerson smiled, thinking of that love's well-earned guerdon. Real marriage at last, passion fulfilled, wifehood crowned by maternity. And then he said to the young, rising surgeon who had brought him the magnificent news, to whose skilled, patient treatment he would owe the recovery of his manhood :

"Go to my wife. She is in the drawing-room. Break the news to her, but gently. Joy sometimes kills. . . ."

The face of the rising young surgeon to whom the Major spoke was twisted with a spasm its owner could not repress. He choked back the bitter, ironic laughter that rose in his throat, and went and knocked softly at the door of the drawing-room, that was at the end of the library. The invalid who was to be a well man before long, heard his wife's soft voice say "Come in!" Then the young surgeon entered the drawing-room, and carefully shut the door behind him. And Makerson, listening with all his ears,

could hear a murmur of voices, but not a word of the colloquy. He ground his teeth with impatience because the wall of the library and the barrier of that closed, curtained door shut out the interview that would be so like a bit out of a novel or a scene out of a play. . . .

In his impatience he sat up on his invalid sofa, and the silk rug that covered his legs slipped to the ground. The thought occurred to Makerson, then, to try whether he could stand. . . .

He achieved the feat. His head swam with triumph and his weakened heart throbbed fast. He was dizzy. He caught at the back rail of a light wheeled-chair for support. It moved, he followed, giddy and faint and dazed with the discovery that he was walking towards that closed door. He reached it, pressed his shoulder against it, panting with the unaccustomed exertion, and it yielded, swinging inwards. He heard Alice's cry of joy—was it joy?—and then the voice of her thanksgiving broke upon his ears and turned the man to stone.

“O God!” she was saying, over and over in a muffled voice, broken by sobs, “is my long torture never to end? Have I not been scourged enough for my mad folly? O God! my God!—have I not suffered enough?”

Her husband saw her. She was on her knees before a low table upon which her arms rested. Her head lay upon them, her bosom was torn, her body was racked, with smothered sobs. And the rising young surgeon stood over her, white-faced and with haggard, desperate eyes of baffled passion, and whispered, as he touched the silky brown hair that sorrow had sown with threads of silver:

“Take care, or Makerson will hear!”

“Let him!” she said; “I do not care! Know, he must, sooner or later, that I have been a slave who loathed her fetters all the more that they were rivetted by her own hand. But my slavery I could bear patiently, looking for

deliverance, knowing myself his only in name ! Helpless, I could tend and pity and tolerate him. Strong and well—I should hate him as I did of old !” The man who listened felt the vibration of her shudder. “Was ever a woman cheated as I have been ?” she went on passionately. “I thought to buy the praise of my world, and the consciousness of being a heroine, at cost of a few weeks of my life. . . . And I have been robbed of seven years ! Years that I might, had God been kinder, have spent——”

“*With me !*” whispered the man who stooped over her. She broke into a passion of weeping then, and her husband, clinging to the wheeled chair, crept away feebly. He collapsed when he reached the invalid couch he had quitted, and fell upon it shuddering and moaning. He felt that this poor disillusioned wretch who suffered had nothing in common with the complacent Makerson of a few moments before. He felt the hands with which he clutched his head as the hands of a stranger. He felt that the man and woman in the adjoining room were strangers too. . . .

What should he do ? Free his wife at any cost from the bondage she so loathed ? He lifted his tear-stained face and looked at his Service revolvers, hanging with his Sam Browne belt, cavalry sword, and leather scabbard on the opposite wall. The revolvers were loaded still. There were morphia-tabloids in the table-drawer. But he could not forego the life that was coming back to him ; hurrying to meet him with outstretched hands after all these years. And, besides, religion prohibited the act of suicide. A deadly sickness of dread came over him as the handle of the drawing-room door turned and his wife came out, followed by the rising young surgeon who had been her husband’s friend and hers. Their set, composed faces told no tales. No scene would take place, no disclosure might be expected. And Makerson, the egoist, drew a breath of relief.

He might have freed his thrall from the dread that lent fresh poignancy to her torture, by an act of common justice ; a solemn promise to exact no more from her who was bankrupt through him in love and joy and all that makes this life worth living. Four words would have done it, but he never was to speak them. Nor upon her side was any revelation to be made. Silence and self-repression had become habitual to Mrs. Makerson. After that one outburst, she was dumb upon the subject of her marriage. She who came to her husband now, and touched his sallow forehead with her cold lips, and congratulated him, was to wear her fetters to the day of her death.

## IX

### A STUFFED LION

MR. CUTTS, the pre-eminently respectable septuagenarian head of the long-established and justly-celebrated firm of Cutts, Mesher, and Sons, Military and Civil Tailors, was in his little glass office behind the Bond Street shop when a well-dressed underling knocked at the door.

“Busy, busy,” said Mr. Cutts, bending his gold spectacles and neatly-trimmed white beard over the private ledger. “Who is it?”

“Mr. Hamblyn, sir, would be glad of a minute’s conversation,” said the foreman, in the subdued accents of respect.

“Has Mr. Hamblyn paid in a cheque on account? No? Bad—very bad!” snapped the tailor. “With a debt of over five hundred standing against him on the books, he can’t expect any more credit until something substantial has been paid on account. Tell him so . . . or, stop! Ask him to step this way.”

“Awfully sorry, Cutts,” said the pleasant voice of the debtor, as the well-bred, well-made, well-dressed, and little short of gigantic personality of Mr. Hamblyn blocked up the doorway of the little glass office. “Can I come in? I think this hutch will hold me if I take off my hat and hold my breath. . . . Look here, my dear man, I meant to come down with the boodle to-day—I did, upon my word! But circumstances were too strong, and luck dead against me.” He lifted his light moustache at one corner and shook his head meditatively. “I counted on the Liverpool

Meeting," he said, "and what's the result? Gay Girl ran wide all the way, Burnt Almond turned the tables, and Scalliwag split the pair, though both of 'em ought to have beaten him on their placings at Esher for the Park Plate. Consequently"—he rattled some loose coins and keys in his right-hand trouser pocket—"it's a case of stony."

The face of the tailor was a study, as he looked up at his customer.

"Then are we to understand, sir," he began, "that you are absolutely unable to pay anything?"

"That's just it!" said the debtor airily. "How quick you are to take things, Cutts!"

"I might return the compliment, sir," retorted Cutts. "You're pretty quick to take things on credit, and uncommonly slow to pay for them. But so was Sir George before you were born."

"Then it's a case of heredity," said the handsome young giant, "and the sins of the father are visited on the son. What?"

"It'll be the other way about," said Mr. Cutts, with the shadow of a grin under his respectable white moustache, "if Sir George has to pay."

"Look here—you ain't going to be nasty, are you?" said Mr. Hamblyn, with unaffected anxiety. "Because, don't you know, if you are, you'd better say so. I shall be sorry to withdraw my custom, Cutts; you've turned me out, and turned me out well, ever since I left Sandhurst—and you must own, if you've given me credit" (he cast an approving glance at the faultless, full-length reflection presented within the chastely-gilded frame of a neighbouring mirror), "I've done credit to you."

"It's true," said Cutts, softening. "But in these times of trade depression we require all the ready money we can get, and, if you will allow me to say it, sir, I shall be

extremely glad when I read the description of your marriage ceremony in the Society papers."

"Will you, by Jove?" said Mr. Hamblyn, with a long, plaintive whistle.

"If I don't commit an indiscretion in saying so," went on Mr. Cutts, "the lady is known to be uncommonly wealthy. That knowledge, sir, has supported us in the absence of your cheques."

"The deuce it has!" cried Hamblyn pettishly, rapping the ledger-desk with the crook of his stick. "Oh, come, Cutts! you can't say that I was ever such a mongrel as to get fresh credit on the strength of being engaged to an heiress! No decent man would dream of such a thing!"

"Perhaps not, sir," admitted Mr. Cutts, who knew human nature better than his customer. "But, still, the knowledge of an approaching change for the better in a customer's prospects weighs with us. It's only to be expected."

"At any rate," said Hamblyn, flicking a grain of dust from his immaculate sleeve, "I'd better tell you candidly that my prospects aren't going to be changed. My engagement with the lady to whom you refer is broken off."

"Broken off!" Mr. Cutts pursed up his mouth and shook his head severely. "This is very sad and regrettable, Mr. Hamblyn," he said. "Dear me! This quite alters the complexion of things. I must consult the firm, sir, and communicate with you later." He opened the glass door of the office, indicating that the interview was over. But Mr. Hamblyn did not move.

"Considering that you're to blame for the collapse of the whole thing," he said, "I don't think, Cutts, you're particularly sympathetic."

"I fail to compre'end you, Mr. Hamblyn," said Mr. Cutts, who under the influence of emotion occasionally dropped an "h." "To state that you consider us responsible in any way for the change in the lady's sentiments is, to say

the least of it, an extraordinary charge. I must ask you to explain your meaning."

"I will!" said Mr. Hamblyn. He rapped with his stick upon the fat parchment stomach of the order-book upon the tailor's desk. "Turn to L, and look up Lullingham of the Hibernian Guards, will you? He began to deal with you, say, three months ago, when he resigned the command of Lullingham's Light Horse, the regiment of Roughriders he raised and equipped in '99, when the South African racket began; and accepted a regular commission with his D.S.O. I sent him to you myself—and much good it's done me!" he added indignantly, as Mr. Cutts smacked open the ledger and deftly skimmed over the pages.

"Captain Grandleigh Lullingham, Guards Club and Halsingham House Chambers. A customer of ours, certainly, and recommended by you, as you say. Extremely tall, fine-looking gentleman."

"I know he's a fine fellow!—a finer fellow by far, morally and physically, than I could ever hope to be," said Hamblyn discontentedly. "Don't rub it in!"

"I said *fine-looking*, if you'll excuse my correcting you, Mr. Hamblyn," retorted Cutts.

"It comes to the same thing," said Mr. Hamblyn, yawning drearily.

"Well, no, sir—if you'll excuse me again. But Captain Lullingham is a stylish figure—very stylish indeed—and four inches in 'ighth superior to yourself, and carries off a well-cut frock-coat better than any customer on our books, yourself excepted."

"Leave me out of it," said Hamblyn. "Acknowledged you turn out Lullingham, and you turn him out well. Unluckily, in turning him out, you've turned out Me! For he's the better-made and the bigger man of the two, and Lady Regina—I should say, the lady of whom you spoke

just now—went over to that opinion a week ago. Like all the women of the Rippingworth lot, you might blow three of 'em away with one squiff of a tyre-pump—they're so fragile and ethereal and all that!—she's death on a *taille d'athlete*, and Lullingham—six feet six, and with a chest like a bull, by Gad!—Lullingham fills the bill. Well! she's pleased, and so is he, if I ain't. And it was never a regular engagement. Morning!" Mr. Hamblyn nodded and went away.

"Stop! Mr. Hamblyn, sir!" said the tailor excitedly. But Hamblyn was in Bond Street by the time Cutts reached the shop door.

"What made me give myself away like that—and to old Cutts, too?" the young giant muttered between his teeth. "My brain must be going soft. There's Reggy in her victoria! Oh, Reggy, you cruel little darling, you've treated me infernally, and you ought to suffer for it!" he added, as a fragile, ethereal vision, all white and pink and golden, was whirled past by a couple of splendid bays. The front seat of the victoria was obscured by the colossal personality of Lullingham. Lady Regina pulled a tiny little white hand out of her great sable muff, and kissed it to her discarded lover as she went by. Her lap was full of Neapolitan violets, and her blue eyes beamed with happiness. She looked as innocent and as joyous as a child with a large new toy.

"You can't expect me to suffer agonies of remorse, Toby dear," she had said in answer to Hamblyn's passionate reproaches. "Grandy is simply splendid, and I adore him. I adored you before he and I met—that is all. Don't you see how lucky it is you and I are not to be married? Oh, you *must*! Because men hate scandal even worse than women; and I should have made hay of our connubial vows, I feel certain. How can a woman resist a man who can

take her up in one hand and walk off with her if he wants to ? You're an angel when you lift a polo pony or bend a poker ; and I simply *worshipped* you when you bit a piece out of a pewter pot that day when you carried off the high-jump competition at the Thews and Sinews Club Sports. By the way, I've got the piece now, with your name engraved on it ; and some other woman will be proud to wear it one day if you like to have it back ? . . . But you're not six feet six, and you can get in at an ordinary kind of door without turning sideways. Now, Grandy can't ! You know the amount of sensation he creates wherever he goes. One can't resist looking—and looking again. And then he did such sensational, dashing things at the Front, with his Roughriders."

" While I was lying under canvas at Mealfontein fighting enteric and carrion flies. . . . But that's the fortune of war, Reggy," put in the poor fellow pleadingly. " One man gets the floor and the flourish, and the other the flies and the fever. And it took four hospital orderlies to hold me down, even when I hadn't had anything but milk for a fortnight. Though I'm not strong enough, now I'm fit, to keep *you* !"

And she had sent him back the ring, and his presents, and the piece of pewter plate. He wondered what shape Lullingham's generosity had taken. Not for a moment did he believe that his rival's wealth had weighed in the balance when Regina's heart passed over to its new possessor. Like her fair prototype Delilah, she liked a Samson—that was all. Here came Samson, striding along the pavement, his immense personality causing an eddy in the stream of fashionably-dressed afternoon strollers, attracting the envious glances of the men he dwarfed by contrast, and the admiring looks of the women he reduced to dwarfs. Certainly Lullingham was a superb specimen of manhood, as far as height and depth of chest, and breadth of shoulder went. His

face was rather too haggard, bronzed, and thin, and his neck and hands too veinous and sinewy, for beauty. But Regina was right—he was worth looking at. Wherever he might be, he would command universal attention. So would the Eiffel Tower !

A faint smile dawned on Hamblyn's face at the idea of Regina succumbing to the attractions of the Eiffel Tower. "She'd throw over Lullingham to marry it if it could only walk and talk and wear Cutts's frock-coats and thingumbobs," he reflected, as Lullingham passed him with a cheery nod. "Hang him ! he can afford to look pleasant !" he added, glancing over his shoulder in time to see his successful rival bend almost double in the act of entering the tailor's shop. Some benevolent fairy it was—it must have been—that caused Hamblyn to turn back and re-enter the same chastely-decorated portals.

He looked round the shop, entering. A subdued light from above fell upon the half-dozen customers who were selecting trouserings with the assistance of Mr. Cutts's young men, but Lullingham was not to be seen, though the deep rumble of his resonant bass voice could be heard from an inner apartment devoted to trying-on. And then, just as Hamblyn was about to make an excuse and go away, wondering why he had been such an ass as to follow Lullingham, Mr. Cutts touched him on the elbow. He turned, wondering why the usually placid man exhibited such excitement.

" You—you're an old customer, sir," stammered Cutts, " and though it's against all the etiquette of the trade to betray a client's confidence, I'm going to do it ! You will please to utter no exclamation or betray surprise while on the premises, and I shall look to you not to give me away if you should decide to employ the—the information gained in any way likely to be beneficial to your position and improving to your prospects. Is it a bargain ? "

"Done with you!" said Hamblyn, without the faintest notion of the tailor's meaning.

"This way, then, sir," said Cutts. He led his rather mystified customer into a small apartment lined with looking-glasses, and containing a chair, a small table, a measuring-tape, a piece of chalk, a hat-rack, and a brass bowl containing pins. From the other side of the partition came the deep, booming drum-notes of Lullingham's voice.

"Why,"—Hamblyn was beginning, when Cutts made an imploring gesture for silence. Then the tailor swung out a hinged looking-glass from the wall, and pointed to a little knot-hole in the matchboarding behind it. It was just the size to accommodate a human eye. Hamblyn knelt down and fitted one of his optics to the aperture.

The compartment adjoining contained Cutts's head fitter, a bearded Swiss; a pale and pimpled assistant, whose coat-lapels were studded with pins; and Lullingham, devoid of upper garments, and looking extraordinarily thin and narrow-chested. The frock-coat the hero had taken off was the subject of animated discussion, as it sat upright on the table in a curiously independent and solid way, instead of relapsing into limp folds like an ordinary garment. Why did Lullingham's frock-coat, Lullingham no longer inhabiting it, behave in this extraordinary fashion? Might not some optical illusion in connection with the knot-hole through which the observer peered be responsible for the strange behaviour of the garment as for the extraordinarily narrow, gaunt, and lathy appearance of its wearer? At this juncture a voice—the voice of Mr. Cutts—hissed a single word in the ear of Hamblyn—

"Padded!"

"By the living Tinker, so he is!" burst from Hamblyn. But before other unguarded expressions could escape him, Mr. Cutts, with wonderful strength considering his venerable years, dragged the incautious young man away.

"Padded, sir, as you say. Lamb's wool and steel springs throughout, though you'd never dream of suspecting from the exterior point of view, it's so artistically done. We—oh, no!—we don't profess that kind of thing. He gets his shapes made by a Parisian firm, and a fortune they must cost. Why, from his neck to his ankles he's nothing but a magnificent imposture. . . . I'd defy anything shorter than a hatpin to reach the real Captain under those layers and . . . No, he doesn't suffer from heat, apparently, but he gets thinner and thinner. A mere framework of bones, sir, and we hang clothes upon it. And now, if, as you say, you have been ousted from your place in the affections of a lady you hoped to marry by the Captain's bleeps and the Captain's chest, prove to her that they're only stuffing, and she'll ask you to forgive her on her bended knees!"

It must be set down to Toby Hamblin's credit that he resisted temptation.

"You mean well, Cutts, and I suppose I ought to be obliged to you, but I can't make use of this. You see, Lullingham may be the mere framework of a man, but he *is* a man, and a brother-officer, and I'm bound to respect his secret! He may be—I've reason to believe he *is*—a living skeleton, faked up with cotton-wool and watch-springs, but he's a plucky fellow, and a fine fellow; and if he does pad like an elderly ballet-girl, he didn't do it because he was afraid of Boer bullets, by George! Of course, I can't expect you to take things in my way, or to understand that I should like to kick myself for having looked through that spyhole. Thanks all the same, though! Good-day to you!" And he strode out of the shop. Before it waited the victoria of his faithless beloved.

"Why, Toby, aren't you going to shake hands," cried Lady Regina. She smiled and sparkled like a fay in a rainbow as she leaned out of her carriage and gave the hapless

young man two little white gloves, warm from her muff, to keep for an instant. "I'm waiting for Grandy," she went on. "Quite like a dutiful wife, isn't it? We are going on to Prince's as soon as he has finished trying on his pretty new frock. Have you been ordering more expensive things, you bad boy? But you'll look such a dear in them that I'll forgive you. Shall you care to drop in at the Siddons Theatre to-night? The first night of a new play, and I've got a box. *The Hollow World*, it's called—the play, I mean. Sounds grue, doesn't it? And dism'y?"

"It ought to suit me!" said Hamblyn, with rather a ghastly smile.

Lady Regina inspected his features with interest.

"You *are* off colour," she announced as a discovery. "Don't say you've been letting a damask worm gnaw at your something cheek, as Viola says in *Twelfth Night*. So absurd! . . . and, besides, I'm not worth it. Train and towel, and bite pieces out of pewter pots, and make all the women admire you. You've a clear field—*now*." Her cruel little dimple added—"now Grandy's out of the running!"

Stung to the quick, Hamblyn retorted :

"Women's admiration doesn't count over and above, I'm beginning to believe. Whether one's a real man or a stuffed dummy doesn't matter to 'em much as long as the outside's all right. Show and glitter—that's all you care for, children as you are. Children—ah! and savages as well. Didn't you wear real jewels as well as strings of coloured-glass beads all last season? Wherever one went, the beastly things were crunching under one's feet."

"As you wish you could scrunch me—judging by your scowl. Really, Toby, you ought to go on the stage—your electrocution, as Jinny's little Monty calls it, would make your fortune."

She was offended; her blue eyes sparkled like icicles.

Then the ice melted as the shop-door opened, and the magnificent figure of Grandleigh Lullingham appeared upon the threshold, Mr. Cutts bowing at his elbow. The quick eyes behind the aged sartorial artist's gold-rimmed spectacles took in the victoria, Lady Regina, and the pale and moody Hamblyn at a glance.

"To-night, without fail, the garment shall be sent home. Gratified to have given you satisfaction, sir ! With such a figure as yours to stimulate the imagination of the fitter. . . . Pray, mind the door-lintel—these premises were hardly designed for customers of your proportions." The tailor rubbed his hands, and smiled and bowed again.

"Well, perhaps not !" said Lullingham, not displeased.

"Coming, Grandy ?" shrilled Lady Regina.

"One second, Captain !" Mr. Cutts whipped a little shining instrument from his waistcoat pocket, and clicked it open in his hand. "You're a little *creased*, sir," he said, in a rapid undertone. "Permit me ! . . ." Elevating himself on tiptoe, he rapidly ran his skilled professional hands over Lullingham's breast and shoulder, following the outline of the upper seams of his immaculate frock-coat, and gave a rapid twitch to the garment at the back. "We did not make *this* !" he said, with a disclaiming shrug. "There, sir ! It sits more elegantly now ! Pray excuse me ! Good afternoon !"

And as Lullingham, with a careless nod to Hamblyn, stowed his tremendous length of leg away in Lady Regina's victoria, and, smiling rapturously into the blue eyes of that fair weathercock, was whirled away Piccadillywards, the tailor watched the retreating carriage over the coats of arms emblazoned on the lower half of his glass door.

"I've done it !" he said ; and as he spoke he closed a tiny little tortoiseshell penknife, and returned it to his waistcoat pocket. "If it gives in the seams—as I've made pretty sure it will—we are not responsible for the accident. The

Captain would never dream of connecting it with us. And if it gives at the right moment, when her ladyship happens to be looking sweet at him, she'll—that is, she ought to—smell rats and cry off, and take on Mr. H. again. If she does, we shall get our money ; if she don't, we may whistle for it, as far as my experience goes."

Thus Mr. Cutts mused as Lady Regina and her lover were whirled westwards.

"Poor Toby looked down in the mouth, didn't he ?" she said. "He doesn't grumble *much*, but I believe he groused inwardly."

"He has reason to grouse," returned Lullingham, leaning forward to look deep into the blue eyes—his own, which were black and rather hollow, glowing with the pride of the triumphant wooer : "Hasn't he lost *you* ?"

"Sit up straight, and don't look so consciously possessive," she commanded.

"Regina !" sighed Lullingham, bringing his face nearer to hers. There was a slight rending sound, which neither lady or lover noticed. "I cannot believe my own happiness," he continued with passionate fervour. "I cannot find words in which to tell you how wildly I worship you. Ah, my darling !" He bent nearer, and his hot breath stirred the sables of the muff she raised as a barrier between their lips. "You will never know"—his tremendous chest heaved with a volcanic sigh—"you will never know all that is hidden *here*, buried under——"

*Crack !*

He sat bolt upright in an instant, but the mischief was done. The shoulder-seams of his tightly fitting frock-coat, secretly slit by the treacherous penknife of the plotter Cutts, had gone by the board—the sleeves themselves had parted from their moorings, there was a gaping slit upon the warrior's manly bosom, and——'

"Oh, oh, oh !" cried Lady Regina, pale beneath her

delicately tinted powder, and with blue eyes opened to their utmost capacity. For the yawning cracks and widening crevasses disgorged the woolly secret of her Grandy's glorious physique. And, irresistibly reminded of the days when her chief delight consisted in the disembowlement of fluffy lambs and bran-stuffed dolls, she burst into a peal of mad hysterical laughter; while Lullingham, upon whom the ghastly betrayal had broken like a moral waterspout, cried hoarsely to the coachman to stop! Before that functionary could obey, however, he had muttered an unintelligible excuse, bowed, sprung from the carriage, and leapt into a passing hansom, which whirled him out of Regina's heart for ever.

She cried a little when she reached home, and snubbed her maid for recommending a dinner-gown which had been a favourite with her vanished lover, putting on instead a ravishing garment which Toby Hamblin had been wont to praise. And after dinner she broke another engagement, and went on to another house where she was certain to meet him. There he was, towering above the crowd, his six feet two inches of stature seeming wonderfully imposing in the absence of the—*the other*.

“ Hallo !” he exclaimed. “ You don’t mean to say it’s you ? And alone !”

“ I never said it was me,” observed Lady Regina. She smiled on him deliciously, quite in the old way.

“ There are so many of you,” retorted poor Toby, over whose brain the old intoxication was already asserting its sway, “ that, of course, you can’t be quite certain which of you you happen to be just at this moment.” He looked so solid and genuine, so splendid a specimen of muscular young manhood, that Lady Regina felt her heart flutter up and settle down on its old perch again as she said : “ I am the one of me you used to like best, Toby. Come and let us look at the tree-ferns in the conservatory.”

So they went. Tree-ferns are convenient things. When Lady Regina finished her confession, and the forgiving Toby, with a choking cry of relief and rapture, clasped her fragile little person to his stalwart breast, they were particularly so.

"Oh, is it true? You care for me again?" he cried.  
"You've given the Living Skeleton the shake!"

"Captain Lullingham understands quite clearly," said Lady Regina, "that I shall never marry him. But why do you call him the Living Skeleton?"

"I—don't know," mumbled Hamblyn. "Tell me, Reggy, did you quarrel?" he asked.

His beloved moved a little restlessly in his embrace.

"I once thought him good and noble," she explained. "But—only this afternoon, it burst upon me in a flash that he was not quite *genuine all through!* Why are you laughing? Yes, you are—it's useless to say no!" For the broad chest upon which her cheek reposed was shaken by subterranean chuckles.

"Perhaps I did do a smile," Hamblyn owned. "The chap who wins can afford to, don't you know? Darling, tell me once again you're mine, really and truly mine, or I shall believe this is all a dream, and that neither of us are real—a bit! Good Christmas! what was that?" he shouted, wineing in agony from a pointed prod.

"Only a little, common, everyday brooch-pin, pet!" murmured Regina caressingly.

"But you stuck it into my shoulder an inch deep!" said the happy lover.

"To make sure that you are real, darling," she explained, as she gave their second betrothal kiss.

## X

## THE RESURRECTION OF FREDDY

WHO does not know the County Gentleman's Club, that solidly respectable façade whose area balconies are ornamented with bronze cornucopias, occurring at regular intervals and piled to overflowing with objects resembling the turnip, the vegetable marrow, the mangold-wurzel, and other homely fruits of the earth ? The largest barometer in London hangs in the entrance-hall ; and if the adult male servants look like farm-bailiffs in livery, the bell-boys are rubicund as plough-lads, and the housemaids plump and roseate as lasses of the country dairy.

Upon a certain morning in March a hale and cheerful personage, of a fur-coated and prosperous appearance, was about to ascend the stately flight of steps leading to the Club portals when, suddenly recognizing the face of an acquaintance beneath a hat that was somewhat the worse for wear, he paused, and, holding out his hand, exclaimed :

“ Good Gad ! Freddy Fellitoe ! ”

The young man thus addressed showed a decent set of teeth in a pleasant smile that lifted a still silky but too ragged fair moustache a good deal at the corners. His clothes were seedy, and he was without an overcoat, points which the man who had hailed him was quick to note. Also his face was haggard and hollow-cheeked, his linen was *passé*, and he wore in his cuffs links of common bone. In his left hand he carried a small and shabby bag, which he appeared to cherish with peculiar care. His

boots were in keeping with the rest of his attire, though so brilliantly blacked that their shininess brought them aggressively into the foreground, and intensified the faded neutral tones of the rest of the picture. In addition to this they were much too large for the young man, and their toes curled upwards with something of a mediæval effect. But the wearer of the boots was as bright as they were. He shook hands three times with his newly-found friend—who was, indeed, a landholder and J.P. of weight and substance in Freddy's own native county—and asked after “the mater and the girls ?”

“Saw 'em at Church on Christmas Day. Your mother looked out of condition ; but your sisters, Dolly and May, were awfully fit. Why don't you run down and see them ? They'd be awfully glad——”

“Would they ?” Freddy's tone was pointed with delicate incredulity. He glanced downwards at his frayed buttonholes and Isabella-coloured cuffs, and turned his clear eyes, of childlike and innocent blue, back upon the face of the other man.

“Of course,” said the other man, flushing a healthy beet ; “you could borrow a tenner and freshen up.” His finger and thumb hovered over his diaphragm, the outline of the notecase beneath seemed to delineate itself in unmistakable lines upon the surface of his fur-lined overcoat. “When I say borrow,” he explained, “I don't mean a loan——”

“I know what you mean,” said the young man in second-hand boots, “and you're a brick, Sir Crowell. But I've not got to squeezing the pater's old friends—yet—though my sense of what's good form and what isn't has—let us say—deteriorated since I began to carry about a permanent appetite.”

“My dear fellow !” interrupted the well-fed other man, “you don't mean to say you're——” He collared Freddy

with a strong hand. "Come in to lunch, you young idiot, come in—"

"Gently! That's a paper collar!" warned the invited guest. Then, as the other man released him in alarm, he went on: "I am infernally sharp-set, I don't deny, and if you're not ashamed of my clothes—"

"Of course," cried the hospitable Samaritan. Then he choked, and, with a deepening complexion, said: "But of course—you know—Boulter is a member of the Club. It won't upset you if he's dining here, will it? He always uses the table next mine."

"Does he?" The corners of Freddy's moustache curled cheerily, the dancing light in his blue eyes expressed anything but discomfiture. "Don't be afraid. Boulter won't upset me!" he said. "As it happens, I was coming here to look for him; and as I've a notion that he'd refuse to see me, you're giving me the very opportunity I want!"

"Done, then!" said the Samaritan. "But it's understood you won't make a scene, or—or anything of that kind. I've my own opinion of Boulter; but a row in the Club, and newspaper pars., and all that beastliness—"

The crystalline purity of the prodigal's gaze silenced him.

"I won't make any row!" said Freddy. "There shall be peace, perfect peace, from the first spoonful of soup to the last cheese-straw. Besides, who knows whether the olive-branch may not sprout, and the tomahawk be buried on this auspiciously opening day?"

The other man shook his head.

"I should be glad to think that, Freddy; but I know Boulter. We all—everybody knows Boulter. What he gets he keeps! My boys were at Eton in Boulter's time and yours; they know something of that very estimable young man. Besides—the Fellitoe entail has been cut off—in consequence of—ahem! and your debts have been settled

—and what was left over you've had—and spent, it's pretty plain from the look of you. But Boulter would only ask you why, when you knew you weren't going to get any more, you didn't husband what you'd got? He wouldn't lend you, or give you, enough to buy a new paper collar. Better take the tenner I spoke of, and—and perhaps I can find another or so when that's gone!"

"I'll bet you the tenner Boulter disgorges twenty before the day's over. I forgot, though—I can't pay you if I lose; but I shan't lose. I am going to start in a new and lucrative line of business, and Boulter is going to give me a pecuniary leg-up out of brotherly love and goodwill. Perhaps, as he is gifted with a keen commercial instinct, he will propose to buy me out. What do you bet me he doesn't?" asked Freddy, his blue eyes dancing under his bad hat-brim, and his aged, aggressively shiny boots performing a little step-dance upon the pavement.

"You're cold and badly-fed, and light-headed in consequence," said the other man. "Come and take in ballast, and don't talk rot!" He placed his elbow behind Freddy's with a scientific air, and conducted his seedily-attired guest into the Club.

"Good Lord!" said Freddy, as the soup, fish, and joint concealed about his rather fine-drawn personality commenced their genial work of renovation, and the third glass of champagne brought colour to his cheek, "what a thing it is to eat again!" He toyed with a rum omelette, and did not disdain aged Stilton. As the last fragment of this ripe speciality was actively endeavouring to elude his pursuant knife, the swing-doors of the dining-room admitted a bullet-headed, pale-faced young man in pepper-and-salt tweeds, red necktie, and drab spats, who was, in fact, Boulter, Freddy's junior by a year. But that a corpulent old gentleman followed close upon his rather projecting heels, Boulter—who recognized Freddy instant-

taneously—would have been as good as his name. But, impelled forward, over the india-rubber draught-mat by the elastic rotundity behind him, Boulter was denied retreat. He walked sullenly forward, nodding bluffly to Freddy's host and sulkily to Freddy, as he took his seat at the next table.

"Crème de Velours!" said Freddy reflectively, as the coffee dispensed its fragrance and the waiter filled the liqueur-glasses. "And—do they let you smoke in here? If so—I'd like one of those Regalias of yours, that used to knock me over like a skittle when I was seventeen." He lighted the weed, and, as the blue smoke curled round his fair, ingenuous brow, the tail of his blue eye, under cover of the perfumed cloud, rested upon his brother. "When I'm fairly started in that new business I told you of, and beginning to make money by fistfuls, I shall trouble you for the address of your tobacconist," he said. "At present I smoke 'Caporal's' at fourpence a packet, and very decent value."

"Ah—speaking of that business," said Sir Crowell, conscious that Boulter's large, rather misshapen ears were open and greedy, "one would like to know something about it?"

"It's a Limited Liability concern," explained the prodigal gravely, "and the Firm is represented by Me. I'm going to set up, in fact, as a 'Teller of Tales.'"

"'A Teller of Tales'? Do you mean to set up as a raconteur of the professional kind?" asked Freddy's host; "and, if so, how are you going to get anything out of it?"

"The Hindus and Persians make the thing pay," explained Freddy, "and why shouldn't I? Mine will be Arabian Days instead of Arabian Nights, that's all. And I guarantee that they will not contain a single reference calculated to bring a blush of sensibility to the cheek of seven-and-thirty. I'll tip you a specimen, if you like,"

he continued. "The title is rather taking. I call it 'The History of the Young Man and the Cowskin Bag.'"

There was a slight noise at the next table. Mr. Boulter Fellitoe had knocked over a pepper-castor. Freddy waited until the article had been replaced, and then began smoothly and rapidly :

"During the reign of the Kaisar-i-Hind there dwelt in a country province of that monarch's kingdom a landed proprietor, a devout Mussulman, who had two sons. The elder was of pleasing appearance but prodigal habits, and his poor old pater—I mean his devout parent—used frequently to warn him, saying, 'Son, by my beard, you will one day go to the dogs !' dogs being, in the opinion of Mussulmans, impure animals." Freddy finished his liqueur.

"Hoyster sauce, sir ?" said the waiter at Boulter's elbow.

"But the prodigal young man persisted in having a high old time, and the devout Mussulman naturally kicked at paying his debts," Freddy went on. "So, when very much pressed for metal, he hied him to the usurers quarter in the city of Balsorah, and borrowed at about nine hundred per cent. And, after many moons, being pressed to pay the interest on a little bill, he confided his embarrassments to his younger brother," said Freddy, "a youth who was the very flower of piety and eye of discretion. And the virtuous one spoke to his brother in distress, saying, 'A writing for seven hundred shiners has just been given me by our father as a reward for the moral excellencies which I possess in such abundance. Take thou the writing, obtain the cash, and of the seven hundred remit me five hundred shiners in gold. The other two retain, with the blessing of Allah !'"

"Freddy," said Freddy's host in a whisper, "*is* there any use in raking all that up ? You——"

But Freddy did not hear. He went on : "Then the young man took the paper and the blessing, and procured the cash, and brought home the five hundred shiners in a cow-skin bag, and gave them to his generous junior when nobody was by. And then, being relieved in mind by the lightening of his difficulties, he sought the neighbouring city of Balsorah, and was sitting at a feast in company with his friends when the officers of the Cadi seized him—"

"Look here, Freddy," his host was beginning.

Boulter sat hunched over his plate at the next table as if in the act of feeding, but his heavy jaws were still.

"He was pinched by the police—arrested by the Cadi's men, I mean—on a charge of forgery and embezzlement," said Freddy. "For the cheque—the writing given by the aged parental Mussulman to his virtuous younger son had originally been for seventy pounds—I mean shiners, and the amount had been beautifully and skilfully increased to seven hundred by the art of a gifted penman. The elder young Mussulman denied having done this, but appearances were against him, especially when his virtuous younger brother—"

"Roast beef or leg of mutton, sir ?" asked the waiter.

Boulter, at the next table, made no reply. He pointed with a heavy, shaking finger to an item on the *menu*—and the waiter went away to get it.

"His virtuous younger brother swore to having indorsed and handed him the cheque for seventy. Of the five hundred sovereigns in the cow-skin bag he flatly denied all knowledge, and the elder young Mussulman found himself in a deuce of a hole. Nobody believed him anything but a blackguard, except one—one girl!—and she was threatened with bread and water and the bastinado if she stuck up for him. But she braved it out like a plucky little Mussulwoman," said Freddy, with a shake in his voice, "and God bless her for it!"

"We weren't as hard on her as you seem to think," said Freddy's host ; "but go on, my boy!"

"Take away this filthy stuff, and get me something I can eat!" snarled Boulter at the next table.

"In the ordinary course of things the Bank would have prosecuted, and the supposed forger and thief would have been tried, and probably sent to penal servitude—I mean, condemned for life to row in the Sultan's galleys"—went on Freddy, "but that the family, egged on by the virtuous younger brother, I should guess, stopped the mouth of the bank by paying up, filled the mouths of the Cadi's men with gold, and prevailed upon the accused thief to accept banishment instead of public disgrace. His debts they paid, cut off the entail of the property, and, giving him a few hundreds, bade him depart, with the blessing of Allah. Then he became an outcast, and when the pater—I mean the aged Mussulman—died, in a year or two, the virtuous younger brother scooped the pool."

"Waiter!" broke in Boulter's hoarse voice, "get me a glass of brandy, and give me the bill."

"But," Freddy went on, in rather louder tones, "though the prodigal elder was practically a ruined man, he sometimes allowed himself to hope that his innocence might be established. If, for instance, he could get hold of that cowskin bag which his beloved younger brother had lent him to bring back those five hundred jimmies—I mean shiners—in. I don't know why he was convinced of this, but he *was*—and one day——"

The chair at the neighbouring table scraped back. Boulter got up.

"Sit down!" said Freddy, in calm, even tones, without turning his head or changing his expression by a hair's breadth, "or by God I'll make you!"

As Boulter obeyed, he proceeded.

"This brings me to the story of 'The Peri under the

Archway.' May I have another liqueur ? Thanks ! The prodigal young man, having got through all his remaining shiners, and having been rendered by a public-school and University education incapable of earning any more, even if he had had a decent character to his back, met under an archway, one dark night, with a Peri possessed by Djins. The Djins had done their work so thoroughly, and the Peri was so much more like a damp roll of old rags soaked in liquor than a human being, that at first the young man didn't recognize her as the once pretty young wife of a man who was a former tenant of the old Mussulman's. She had disappeared a month or two before his own smash. Now she turned up again just in the nick of time. . . . Would you——?"

"I wasn't moving!" said the sulky voice behind Freddy.

"I have eyes in the back of my head—for you," said Freddy ; "so down, you hound, and don't stir until I tell you to!"

"Go on!" said Freddy's host, in an intensely eager voice. "Good heavens, man ! if you hint at any discovery——"

"There's none to make!" said the quavering, sulky tones of Boulter ; "I swear there's not!"

"Shall I go on, Sir Crowell?" said Freddy, "or will you take your future son-in-law on trust?"

"You've heard that?" Sir Crowell flushed purple to the crown of his handsome bald head.

"I have ears all over me—where *she* is concerned," said Freddy, "and for the sake of the girl whose mother has bullied her into consenting to become the wife of this Yahoo behind me, you'd better hear how the Peri became owner of the cow-skin bag. For she had it in her possession under the railway arch where she was lying—the habitation of many Djins—and when the penniless young man struck a match upon a stone to light his last cigarette,

he saw the bag, with the initials 'B.L.F.' staring him in the face. . . . 'Boulter Lambourne Fellitoe,' B.L.F., Boulter Lambourne. . . . He'd seen that bag in his dreams every night for months, and here it was within grab. He'd have given his blood for it—but he didn't rob the Peri. He waited until she'd slept off the Djins, and then he said, 'I know you—you were Sally Ansdell!' And she had a turn of the shakes, and slobbered out between her chattering teeth, 'You're Master Freddy. O Lawd! O Lawd!' And so I came to know that we were together, starving on the stones under that archway, thanks to one man—and he's shaking like another Sally here behind me! He took her abroad with that five hundred, got tired of her, and sent her about her business with a pound or so, quite in the Boulter style; and she'd gone down to the depths with other drowned things as shameful as herself, poor soul! But she'd got the cow-skin bag, and she'd got his letters to her: in one of 'em he tells her he'll have five hundred pounds from the pater on a certain day—the day I played catspaw and cashed his forged cheque—and I've got the woman herself, ready to come forward when she's wanted! As for the cow-skin bag——" He stooped and took the shabby, battered object from beneath the table. "Here it is, you see. Having at this moment no permanent place of abode, I carry my wardrobe, and the letters to which I have referred, in this, the principal *pièce de conviction*. We will adjourn to a private place to examine the letters. And, with Boulter's permission, I suggest Boulter's rooms!"

"Where you like," said Boulter croakily, without removing his gaze from his empty plate, "so long as you don't talk so loud."

So to Boulter's rooms, a suite of palatial apartments in a Piccadilly mansion, the three men and the cow-skin bag

were, by taxi, speedily transferred. You are to imagine the scene when the fateful bag was opened, and Boulter's guilt in Boulter's own handwriting made very plain in the eyes of the county baronet and J.P. who within a few days would stand in the lofty relationship of father-in-law to Boulter. And Sir Crowell fairly groaned, his bluff face drawn into lines of despair and consternation, while Freddy, as master of the situation, occupied the hearthrug ; and Boulter sat heavily hunched up in the writing-chair, the personified image of dull, dull guilt.

"What's to be done ?" Sir Crowell wiped his damp forehead and appealed to Freddy. "Give us time, my boy—give us time ! There is another to consider, remember. You spoke of her just now, and you wronged my wife, by George ! when you talked of Ethel being bullied by her mother into the engagement. She—she *loves* him—that fellow hulking in the chair. She took your part—she's told me so a hundred times—because he was your brother!"

"*Because he was my—brother ?*" . . .

If the Freddy on the hearthrug now was very unlike the Freddy who had been there a moment ago, and much more like the haggard young man who had found the Peri under the railway arch, the "fellow hulking in the chair" had undergone another and even more unpleasant change. For he leaned back and thrust his hands into his pockets, and smiled—and it was not a pretty smile ; nor would it have looked so even on a better type of countenance.

"She—Ethel,—loves *that*!" Freddy's white face and blank eyes were turned upon the fortunate possessor of Ethel's affections, and the incredulity and horror in his tone brought a dull flush of colour into Boulter's heavy face.

For all retort, he plucked a letter out of an inner pocket of his coat, and threw it upon the hearthrug.

" You've seen that writing before, I dare say," said the virtuous young Mussulman of Freddy's story. " You're mentioned in that letter. And I give you permission to read every word!"

He leaned back again, his thick hands in his pockets, while Freddy read the letter. His face never changed from its blank expression as he read, but a slow, thin trickle of blood from the underlip he gripped between his teeth told something of the struggle that went on in him. For a moment, the letter finished, he turned his face away; then he refolded it, replaced it in its envelope, and gave it back to his brother.

" You're satisfied, I hope?" Boulter asked, with a faint grin.

Freddy said he was. Then he turned to Ethel's father:

" If I let him go free—if I spare him for her sake, will you let her marry him?" he asked. " He has money now; he will not need to forge and steal and swindle for the sake of the things that money buys. And you will be near, and, knowing him, you will have a hold upon him. You will be able to guard *her*. Will you let the marriage take place? Answer me, please!"

" You'd better do as conscience and honour and all the rest prompt you!" advised Boulter, lolling back with his thick arms crossed upon his chest. " Don't go against 'em to oblige *me*!"

" Good Lord!" groaned Sir Crowell, " after what he has done—knowing what he is——"

" Ethel says in the letter I have been privileged to read," said Freddy, " that even if he had been guilty of the crime for which I have been made outcast—she would have married him."

" Women," said Sir Crowell helplessly, " are damned idiots!"

Freddy, for reply, lifted the cow-skin bag and tilted the

letters it eontained into the red heart of the open fire. Then he set the bag on top, and crunched it down with his broken boot. He took the limp hat and turned towards the door, as Sir Crowell cried :

“ Freddy, what on earth are you going to do ?”

“ My affair !” said Freddy quietly. Then he felt in his waistcoat pocket and gave a dirty scrap of paper to Sir Crowell. “ The Peri’s address,” he explained. “ Have something done for the poor wretch—anonymously ; get her into a home or—somewhere where she can die in cleanliness and peace.”

“ And you—Freddy—for Heaven’s sake !—what——”

Sir Crowell grasped at the sleeve of the threadbare coat, but it tore in his hand, and his only answer was the closing of the outer door.

## XI

## LIEGE LADY MINE

PETER had been foiled in the manœuvre, ocularly concerted with a flame of the last three seasons, frisky, married, and of opulent charms ; and found himself, in the order of precedence, "fobbed off with a raw school-girl," as he mentally phrased it, noting the absolute simplicity of her white dinner-gown ; the string of pearls encircling her long, slim throat ; the fine, unfleshy contours of shoulders, bust, and arms, displaying the slight angularities so suggestive of adolescence. She was very tall—would be taller by-and-by, he said to himself—waist a little flat, unrounded by the hateful French corset ; hair yellow as the furze-blossom—no, furze-blossom has a tinge of green, say silk newly reeled from the cocoon—swept up in uncompromising fashion from the back of her white neck and young, pink-tinted, blue-veined temples to crown her with a coil stabbed through with an enamelled bodkin of antique Italian work. Her nose was straight, with a provoking tilt at the tip, her eyelashes brown, and as she kept her eyes determinedly upon her plate it was only possible to conjecture their colour. At this juncture, recalling himself to send a passionate glance in the direction of the flame of three seasons back, and receiving a glare in return, Peter realized that, instead of ignoring his dinner-companion as he had intended during the progress of the meal, he had occupied himself with her to the exclusion of the woman who temporarily owned him ; and he laughed aloud.

"Did I say anything funny without knowing it?" asked the woman who sat upon his right.

"I don't think so!"

"My dear Peter," she said, casting a pitying glance at him over a round and whitewashed arm, as she helped herself largely, Peter noticed, to the second *entrée*, "you have got it very badly!" and her eye, leaving the dish, travelled meaningly down the opposite side of the table.

"What?" asked Peter.

"*It*," answered the woman on his right, driving the meaning home with the monosyllable by a disdainful little wag of her chin at the flame of three seasons back.

"My dear Mrs. Mauleverer," said Peter, putting up his eyeglass in his most famous way, "you were always a delightful oracle. Now"—he rather wondered whether he had got the right word—"now you are a charming Sphinx."

"Like that dear thing in the desert at Gizeh, with its nose knocked off, and a little, *little* temple in its lap," gushed Mrs. Mauleverer.

"I don't recall the temple. I remember the dust," said Peter, "the donkeys, and the human scarecrows that howled and whacked them. I remember also some first-class snipe-shooting we got near Luxor, and how the hotel *chef* ruined them by serving them headless in a brown sweet sauce, without toast." As though overcome with painful memories, Peter dropped his eyeglass.

"Do men ever think for long of anything unconnected with eating?" said the Mauleverer, looking disdain out of a pair of large, effective, black-edged eyes.

"I heard an 'Arry on a Bank Holiday declare to the young lady in feathers whose arm was round his waist that it made him fair 'ungry to see her in that 'at,'" returned Peter. "Wherefore one may take it that, in the case of the soulless male being, the passion of admiration does stimulate the appetite."

"Ah! Now you are talking nonsense," said the acute Mauleverer, "and I wonder what for? Mrs. Le Count won't look at you, so perhaps this is the madness of despair?"

"Mrs. Le Count be——"

Peter bit his moustache in time to arrest Mrs. Mauleverer's acutely arched eyebrows ere they vanished under the valance of her transformation *coiffure*.

"Mrs. Le Count bestows her glances where they are better deserved. She has made complete conquest of that astonishing old boy beside her, the antiquated dandy out of *Coningsby* or *Lothair*, with the embroidered velvet waistcoat, the frilled cambric shirt, and soft wristbands, high-collared coat, and muslin-swathed stock with the diamond brooch. . . . Who is he, do you know?"

Mrs. Mauleverer gave signals of distress. Peter went on in his slow, sweet drawl:

"He must have been uncommonly handsome in his prime—about the period of the Second Empire, one would say. Whoever makes him up is an artist. That wig, seen upon a block, would suggest the face, style, air, of the man destined to wear it. I quite wish I knew who he is!"

Mrs. Mauleverer had turned her shoulder. Peter's left-hand companion it was who gave, in a clear, ringing, rather high young voice, the desired information.

"He is Lord Hesden!"

Her eyes were slate-blue, large, well-opened, and a little indignant in expression, it occurred to Peter, as they met his own.

"Hesden! The eccentric, curio-collecting Earl! Ah, yes! I can place him now," murmured Peter, "as the man who paid three thousand for a bogus Egyptian Royal head-dress supposed to have been the tiara of the Queen who built the third Pyramid, or who didn't!—and presented it to the South Kensington Museum, only to find

that it had been made by a Cairene jeweller who'd settled in Soho. . . . I wonder whether he has any heirs, and how they like his expensive little fad?"

"Before I let you go on," said the girl, without lowering her voice, and favouring Peter with her full-face view, "I ought to tell you that he—I mean Lord Hesden—is my father!"

"Good lor!—I hope you will forgive me!" said Peter blankly. "Why, in the face of the awful possibilities of the dinner-table, people go on asking their neighbours who other people are? is one of the life-problems which will never be explained to us. If I have said anything offensive, please forget it! It won't be the least use my promising never to do it again; I'm sure to!"

And Peter looked so penitently at his young neighbour that she laughed aloud and merrily.

"I will not only forgive you," she said, "but answer the other question you asked just now, about father's heirs. There are only three of us, Grandville and Dorothy and me—I am Felicity—and we don't mind his collecting-fad a bit when the things he collects are clean. Some of them aren't. I don't mean mummies—they're only dusty; but African fetish-wigs and things for ju-ju. . . . Grrh!" Lady Felicity lifted her white, rather thin shoulders to her ears, without the slightest anticipation of Peter's eyeglass.

"May I give you some more grapes, Lady Felicity?" said Peter, with deep respect.

"Stodged, thanks!" was the unaffected response. Then Lady Felicity blushed, a healthy sweep of colour covering not only her delicately curved cheeks, but her charming temples, swamping the roots of her fine floss-silk hair, and spreading downwards to her neck-string of pearls. "I oughtn't to have said that, I suppose. But Grandville does it, and I was always his favourite sister. He's such a dear, you can't think! and we get on like smoke, only we

quarrel sometimes over heroes in books. He calls the Knight of the Swan a muff, and Prosper Le Gai a conceited ass ; and I consider Kim a Eurasian imp, and abominate Captain Kettle.” She stopped for breath. “ But the worst row we had,” she went on, tossing her head as if throwing back a mane of hair, “ was over——” She stopped, the very tips of her pretty ears dyed crimson. “ How silly ! I won’t say !”

“ Do say !” urged Peter, entreaty shining through his eyeglass.

“ The Duchess is going to give the signal. I shall have to go away with the other women,” said Lady Felicity.

“ The Duchess smokes three cigarettes with her curaçao, and likes coffee at the table. . . . We’re all right for now !” said Peter cheeringly. “ You were going to tell me why you rowed with Lord Grandville ?”

“ Oh ! he found out about Sir Agolane de Vergy !”

“ About Sir Agolane de Vergy ?” Peter echoed, with circular eyes.

Lady Felicity bit her lip and frowned, turning pale instead of rosy this time.

“ There ! I said I wouldn’t tell you !” she cried, the tears of vexation rising in her slate-blue eyes.

“ I belong to that class of men,” said Peter insinuatingly, “ to whom women instinctively turn when they need someone to confide in.”

“ He was that kind of man !” said Lady Felicity, drawing a deep breath.

“ Sir Ago—h’m ?”

“ Sir Agolane.” Lady Felicity spoke with an averted face, and played nervously with some grape-stalks. “ The secret of a lady, reposed in him, was as if enclosed in an iron coffer, locked and hidden at the bottom of the sea.”

“ Close kind of man, what ?” commented Peter.

"Close isn't the word to use in describing him," retorted Lady Felicity. "His generosity in everything was a proverb. When he had money he gave with both hands to everyone who asked for it. . . ."

"Wish I'd known the buffer!" murmured Peter.

"He was perfectly splendid in every way," retorted Lady Felicity, turning a lovely glowing face and a pair of shining eyes full on the dazzled Peter. "He was the very flower of chivalry, the heart of valiance. He had no aspirations save for high desert and honour, and those he sought that he might gain thereby his lady's smiles."

"And she——?" Peter's eyeglass was inquisitive.

"Dorothy and I used to be she—her, I mean—by turns. She judged the prize at the tournament, assisted him to arm, and was the first and the most joyous," said Lady Felicity, with drooping lashes, "to hail his safe return from the perils of war!"

"War?" hazarded Peter.

"He fought the battles of his country and his Church, and he did great deeds when he visited the Courts of Europe, and challenged and overcame the principal representatives of foreign chivalry one after another," went on Lady Felicity in a voice that was a little high-flown and artificial, as a child's repeating a lesson by rote. "And he achieved wonders in the Crusades," she added.

"I gather," remarked the enlightened Peter, twisting his moustache rather carefully. "that the gentleman is dead?"

"Nothing of the kind!" flashed Lady Felicity. "He never lived—except for me and Dorothy."

"Ah! . . . you must have found him a great resource," observed Peter politely, though his eyeglass was glazed with bewilderment.

"We were driven to invent him and pretend he is alive," said Lady Felicity, turning her bright eyes and her charm

ing eager face on Peter, "when we found out how simply awful the young men of the present day are—I mean, by contrast with those that lived once—even as short a time back as *Esmond*."

"You mean the very young men, I hope?" pleaded Peter.

"They have no chins, or too much," said Lady Felicity, with a little grimace of disgust; "and no teeth, or too many; and they don't talk at all, or they babble, without ever stopping, about nothing. They never read, they don't care for Poetry or for Art"—both these words began with a capital letter when pronounced by Lady Felicity—"and if you told them that Beethoven composed 'Take Me In A Taxi—' or that Chopin wrote musical comedies, they'd regularly swallow it for Gospel. They like married women better than girls. . . ."

"Idiots!" said Peter, quite savagely, glancing down the table on the opposite side.

"And they like people who dance and sing at music-halls even better than the married women," went on Lady Felicity. "Look! the Duchess is collecting eyes."

"The men don't stay behind with the decanters, even for a thirsty minute, in this house," said Peter joyfully; "so mayn't I hear some more about Sir Thingolane in the drawing-room?" Without waiting for permission, he followed close upon the slim figure in the simple white gown, and the flame of the three last seasons launched, from the comfortable double settee she had thoughtfully secured, the slings and arrows of her too opulent charms at the gleaming target of Peter's eyeglass in vain.

"Who is that girl talking to Captain Powerslane?" she asked snappishly of a male hoverer who would have liked a share of the double settee.

"Captain Powerslane? . . . Is that the R.H.A. man who blew up an ammunition-convoy seized by Boers, or

something, in 1902, and got the D.S.O.? Plain beggar, if plucky," said the hoverer. "The girl is—let me see—Lady Felicity Marr-Vining, old Lord Hesden's youngest girl."

"He didn't claim her at dinner," and Peter's flame of three seasons back put up her glass. "Pretty, but gawky," she commented, and sweeping her frills from the other half of the settee went in for making Peter simply wild. If Peter had seen—! But Peter was hugging his knee, and bringing his eyeglass to bear upon the question:

"What made you think of Sir Agolane de Thingumy?"

"I've told you! . . . As for his name and character, some came out of the *History of Chivalry* and some out of the *Treasury of Romance*," said Lady Felicity. "And Dolly and I took it in turns to be his liege lady fair. Whoever was out of the chief part for the time being used to be the pilgrim with cockles and news from the Holy Land, or the faithful page who brought letters in his shoes. Of course, we wrote the letters ourselves."

"You never—either of you—saw much of Sir Agolane, then?" asked Peter.

"How stupid you are! . . . We never see him. . . . We are always going to; but something happens, and he sends a herald or a pilgrim or a page instead."

"You—she—both of you must find things dull without him," said Peter musingly. "Because a man of that kind must be missed, you know."

"We tried embroidering his deeds with crewels on hopsacking, but it took too long; and we collected simples and made balm for his wounds in the schoolroom saucepan, and we gave alms of barley-cakes and cold water in his name to wayfarers at the wicket of the lower postern, saying, 'Pray for the valiant Knight, Sir Agolane de Vergy.'"

"How did the wayfarers take that?"

"They didn't take it, if you mean the alms of barley-

cakes and the water, until we thought of promising them pennies afterwards, and then," said Lady Felicity, "they asked to see the money first—tramps are awfully unbelieving."

" You mentioned the postern-gate just now," said Peter, screwing his glass in tightly. " Might one be permitted to ask in what division of Great Britain the castle belonging to the postern is to be found ?" ..

" In West Wales," said Lady Felicity. " You've heard of Caer Ninian, haven't you ? Father added it to his collection of curiosities five years ago, and we really live more there than anywhere now."

" Condescend to mention a day," said Peter, in his silkiest drawl, " when the usual dole will be distributed by the Lady Felicity to the wayworn wanderer and the passing pilgrim at the gate of Ninian Castle ?"

" Oh, we've nearly given up all that childish nonsense," said Lady Felicity proudly. " But we're going to be there all through May," she added immediately. " That duffing Egyptian tiara of father's has got to be made up for somehow. And we're going now. . . . I can see him feeling in his coat-tail pocket for his velvet cap."

She rose, slim as a young birch-tree and upright as a lance, and gave her cool, bare hand to Peter, looking him frankly in the eyes. And when Lord Hesden had fussed himself and his daughter into the hired brougham, and told the coachman to drive home to their Clarges Street lodgings, Felicity said to herself, leaning back against the unspringy cushions and staring out into the bare midnight streets, blue and chilly-looking in the spaces illuminated by the electric light :

" Dolly would have shuddered at the idea of giving Sir Agolane a carroty moustache and a brick-red, sunburnt face. So would I, I suppose—once !"

" Get away to bed with you," rasped the parental voice,

as the brougham stopped. " You'll be as yellow as a guinea in the morning."

So Felicity went dutifully upstairs, and slept excellently, and did not fulfil the prediction about the guinea. It was the owner of the red moustache who had an inferior night.

" What fools we sons of men are ! what fools !" Peter kept saying over and over, as he thumped his unrepouseful pillow and tugged angrily at the rumpled sheets. " All of us, without exception, fools and brutes and slaves. We barter away the best years of our lives for a kiss, and from what lips ! We learn when we have borne the yoke and smarted under the lash—Heaven knows how long ! that we might have been free instead of bond, happy instead of confoundedly wretched, rich instead of bankrupt in everything that goes to make existence worth having, if we'd only chosen. The bandage is taken from our eyes, and we see the mud walls of the prison we thought a palace ; and the wild oats we've sown and reaped,—ground into flour, kneaded into bread and eaten like the rest,—we sicken at the taste of ! I've a month's mind to knock at the wicket of the lower postern, and ask for a share of barley-cake and a drink of water, if I thought she'd——"

A man rarely troubles himself to deplore the past unless he has good reason to fear its having a prejudicial effect upon the future. Peter, with some ingratitude, now regarded Mrs. Le Count as belonging exclusively to the past. With his breakfast he received a brief missive, written in violet ink on heliotrope paper with a green monogram. The handwriting was familiar, the sentiments expressed not new. The writer informed Peter that a gulf had opened between them, and that unless he came to lunch at two sharp, nothing would ever bridge it over. Peter tore the letter into little bits, and put them in the slop-basin and poured hot milk over them, in which dissolving

element the words vanished and the paper became a slight mourning pulp.

"Bother the woman!" he said—and, perhaps, not only "bother." Then he glanced at the date above the columns of his newspaper. It was April 27, and the liege lady of Sir Agolane would be back at Caer Ninian early in May. "For the whole of May," she had told him. Meanwhile, there was not much chance of meeting her, but—but Peter, dressed with the most scrupulous care, did a great deal of calling upon people he knew, who were likely to know Lady Felicity. And he rode in the Park a surprised cob, who could not understand why an acquaintance of three seasons with Mrs. Le Count's tall, raking chestnut must be suddenly broken off. Also, Peter walked in frequented places at fashionable hours; in fact, beat every imaginable kind of society covert without a single draw. Then, upon May 1, as a popular writer says, "a strange thing happened." A postcard of the pictorial kind, directed to Peter at Peter's club, in a laboriously square and upright girlish hand, sent a throb of bliss unutterable tingling to the very core of Peter's heart. His eyeglass dropped, his hand trembled. The postcard, when he mustered composure to examine it, bore the Ninian postmark. All of the other side, save a brief epistolary margin, was occupied by a somewhat smudgy photograph of Ninian Castle, a rather imposing but rickety-looking Norman keep, enclosed within a massive curtain-wall, flanked by a ditch, and guarded by battlemented towers of the usual miff-box shape.

"An unhealthy old bat-haunt!" Peter termed the ancient pile, thinking of a lovely old Tudor hall in Deershire that owned no châtelaine. (Did I mention that Peter was "somebody," and had inherited, with an ancient name, a not inconsiderable share of this world's dross?) And then, examining the photograph of the castle with the aid of his searching eyeglass, he discovered a blotchy cross in ink

marked upon the wall at the base of the right-hand gate-tower. Truly, there was the arch of a small postern, nearly smothered in the ivy that mantled the place. Peter pocketed the card, having foolishly kissed the blotty cross, and got his Bradshaw, only to learn that until ten o'clock that night no train would leave Paddington for Ninian. It was a blow, but Peter was a man of action. He telegraphed to the station-master that he wanted a special express for West Wales, hurled himself into a hansom, and followed on the heels of his wire.

"Five shillings a mile, *plus* the ordinary fare, paid in advance," said the station-master. "It figures up to about seventy pounds." Peter put down the money, and the arrangements were clicked out there and then. Something in the wild, wistful gleam of Peter's eyeglass must have gone to the heart of the official, for when he had said, "Platform number a hundred-and-one ; she'll be ready in ten minutes," he added, reaching out his hand and grasping Peter's, "I trust, sir, I sincerely trust, you will find your good lady as well as can be expected!" and turned away to hide a sympathetic tear.

Peter's usually brick-red complexion had scarcely lost the damson hue evoked by this aspiration, when, in solitary grandeur, he steamed out of Paddington and thundered away for Wales. It was barely half-past eleven ; the special was due to reach the bourne of his desires about eight—with luck, a few minutes before. Realizing, in a brief, lucid moment, that the journey had been undertaken without even such necessary equipments as a railway-rug, a tooth-brush, a clean collar, or as much provision as a hard-boiled egg, Peter began to wonder whether he had proved himself to belong to an entirely new species of ass, or whether he was merely one of the ordinary kind ? But he did not wonder long. He reverted to his thoughts about Lady Felicity, whose ears ought to have been burning. Perhaps

they were, for she knew in sending that postcard to Peter's club she had committed a forward and unmaidenly action. She threw sops to her conscience by saying to herself, over and over again, that he would never dream from whom the postcard came. She had hunted him up in *Who's What?* and that enlightening annual had supplied her with facts relative to the blowing up of the cartridge-convoy, when the carts with their escorts were held up by Boers between Madjesfontein and Greensluyt in 1902, and Peter's resultant D.S.O.

"Sir Agolane could hardly have beaten that!" she said to that gentleman's other inventor and proprietress.

"You forget," retorted Lady Dorothy, "that in that single-handed combat with the Danes, though his left cheek and half his chin were sliced off by Grimwulf's three-handed sword Backbiter, he continued to do battle and slay, though the hall in which they fought was burning."

"He only left off when the roof tumbled in, Dolly," said Lady Felicity, with a sudden blaze of colour in her fair cheeks. "I think we ought to let it bury him, and give—give a chance to somebody alive!"

"The man who wins my hand," said Lady Dolly sternly, "must be something more than merely alive. Blowing up a convoy isn't everything. He must risk peril, endure toil, and support hardships for me, and think himself richly rewarded if I permit him to kiss the tip of my finger. Do we distribute alms, as usual, at the postern to-day? The jackdaws and starlings will be disappointed if we don't."

Lady Felicity assented with a sigh, and Lady Dolly, taking a basket furnished with cold toast and oatcake, led the way.

The most habitable dwelling-rooms at Ninian were on the western side of the inner courtyard, the long hall and the many-windowed drawing-room above it commanding a

vast expanse of sea-poppied sand-dunes, fringed by the white breakers of Bridget's Bay. The eastern side of Ninian harboured only legends, jackdaws, and bats ; and the stairease leading from the gatehouse-arehway to the lower postern had never seemed more damp and unpleasant than on the morning of this second of May.

"We've forgotten the water!" said Lady Dolly, with a shiver. "I'll run back and fetch the bottle and glass."

"You're always forgetting the water," said Lady Felicity, rather crossly. But Lady Dolly was already halfway across the courtyard. So Lady Felicity, tucking her morning frock, a well-worn blue serge garment, carefully above her slim silk-stockinged ankles, descended the slimy stone steps, and, feeling through the darkness for the heavy bolt of the postern, drew it back, rattling in its worn grooves and pulled open the door. With the door came the head and shoulders of a man who had been dozing with his back against it.

"A tramp," thought Lady Felicity, "and I'm all alone! . . . And there's nothing but cold toast and oateake!" she added mentally.

But the man had picked himself up, and rescued his hat —a battered grey bowler, with what an Ameriean would have termed "a chunk" out of the brim ; and, as he stood before her, battered, ragged, gritty, and dusty, as though he had rolled in a cinder-bunker first and a sandpit afterwards, she knew Peter. His eyeglass had not deserted him, and his moustache and complexion were redder than Lady Felicity had deemed.

"Oh!" she said, "it is——"

"Gentle Lady," said Peter, "you see before you Sir Agolane de Vergy, a knight fresh from the wars. Dare I hope that for the sake of your vow of charity to pilgrims and wanderers you will extend to me a portion of your alms?" He hungrily eyed the basket. "I left Paddington

yesterday at eleven-thirty, and many strange adventures have happened since."

"But there's no train after ten," said Lady Felicity. "You must have come by the night mail? . . . No, you didn't, for it's only steaming into the station now," she added, as a distant locomotive-shriek came from the lower level of the railway-line. "How *did* you get here?"

"I chartered a special," said Peter, "when your post-card came. We got along first-class until we branched off at Mervyl-Tidthur, and then we ran into the tail-end of a cow-excursion train." He glanced at the ragged elbow of his left arm, which was bandaged, and supported in an improvised sling made out of a blue window-strap of Government make.

"Oh, you're hurt!" cried Lady Felicity, her blue eyes darkening with pity. Peter dusty, Peter ragged, Peter wounded, and wounded for her, appealed to her passion for the romantic and chivalresque.

"I've only dislocated my wrist, and got a cut or two," said Peter. "The driver and stoker came off with a shaking. It was the guard who got beans—I mean, sustained serious injuries. I had to stay to look after him a bit, poor chap! Then," he added, "I hired a light engine and came on. I had some trouble in finding your doorstep, and, once I landed on it, I stopped."

"All night," gasped Lady Felicity, "in the dark and the cold!"

"It was night," said Peter, "and certainly cold, but I think I found it rather agreeable than otherwise." His eyeglass could not hide the look that accompanied the words. And, strangely enough, at that psychological moment he was conscious of a happiness never previously tasted, while Felicity was flooded with a wonderful sense of having met his look and heard his words before.

"You must come in and be looked after, and have some

breakfast." There was a little tremble in her voice, and her blue eyes were shining like stars seen by day.

"It may seem odd. . . . I haven't had the pleasure of being introduced to Lord Hesden!" Peter began.

She cut him short. "Would Sir Agolane have bothered whether he had been introduced or not?"

"I don't suppose he would," said Peter. "I'm a bad hand at inventing," he went on very earnestly. "Do you mind telling me what Sir Agolane would really have said to his liege Lady Felicity if he had happened along in eockles as a pilgrim after sixty years or so spent in fighting the Paynim . . . and found her waiting at the postern gate? . . . I haven't fought anything but Pathans and Burmese and Boers, I want you to understand plainly . . . and instead of doing deeds for the honour of my liege lady, I have done things that brought dishonour to myself! There never was such a one-horse knight!" said Peter, paling under his sun-tan, "but I've never been a craven, or a eur, or a ead, and—and—"

"You blew up those ammunition-carts," whispered Lady Felicity. "And you— Oh, please come in and let us do something for that poor, poor wrist of yours!"

Peter held back. It was so sweet to watch her lovely lips as she pleaded with him for himself.

"Tell me, you don't think me an intrusive idiot for coming and camping on your doorstep like this?" he insisted.

"I don't! I—I wanted you to do it!" said Lady Felicity, looking at him bravely. "Now, will you come in?"

"Not without an appropriate speech," affirmed Peter. "I must play the game, you know. What would Sir Agolane have said in my place? Remember what I have owned to you, please!"

"He might say: '*I have fared to many lands, and borne*

*the brunt of many conflicts, and sometimes conquered and at other times been worsted. And I have set my feet in strange paths and my heart upon false idols, and turned from Purity to Impurity, and made Evil my Good. But in my heart I knew that Truth was the only beauty, and Honour the only prize, and Purity the pearl beyond all jewels.’ I didn’t invent this ; it’s out of ‘Sir Balyn the Brave’ : ‘ Wherefore I have returned to thee ’—not that you have, you know ! ‘ Love, dost thou bid me leave thee, or never depart from thee more ? ’ ”*

“ And his liege Lady,—Felicity!—what did she say ? ” whispered Peter.

“ She said—in ‘ Sir Balyn ’—‘ Do not leave me, my beloved ! Never depart from me more ! ’ ”

“ I—I wish you would say that ! ” begged Peter, looking at Felicity with wistful eyes set in eaves that had been suddenly dug round them. “ I wish to Heaven that you would say that ! I don’t deserve it ; but it would be—good to hear ! ”

“ Here is Dolly—she’ll be awfully surprised,” said Lady Felicity, in a fluttered voice, as light footsteps sounded on the postern stair. Then she leant a little nearer to Peter and stretched a pitying hand towards his invalid arm: “ If you’ll come in, and let us give you some breakfast, and ”—she laughed nervously—“ bind up your wounds, I’ll—I’ll say it.”

Peter was inexorable. “ Say—what ? ”

Felicity said it, her fringed eyclids drooping on her crimson cheeks, her whole young body one blissful quiver, her lips moving as measuredly as those of a good school-child repeating a lesson: “ Do not leavo me, my—my beloved ! Never depart from me more ! ”

And Peter went in to breakfast.

## XII

### TOTO THE TEMPTER

As a middle-aged bachelor, who was at Harrow with the culprit, it was my fate to aid for the—well, not for the first time—in tinkering up a reconciliation between Courboys, Gentleman—of no occupation, since his enforced retirement from the Diplomatic Service in 1907—and his wife ; Courboys having once more kicked over the marital traces, and the vehicle attached to the pair, a joint establishment in Mayfair—originally lined with the domestic affections and varnished with the proprieties and virtues—having sustained damage at the flying heels of the most mercurial of husbands. For Mrs. Courboys was altogether beyond reproach—a duodecimo Lucretia, the glance of whose large violet-grey eyes had power to freeze the most enterprising of men, had he dared to button her glove too ardently or open her sunshade with more *empressment* than discretion warranted. Yet this charming ice-statue was never destitute of adorers, doomed to a pursuit as unending and as hopeless as the satyr's chase of the nymph upon the proverbial Grecian vase.

To Courboys, however, she was passionately devoted, and such strange creatures are men that I have often wondered whether the refrigerating business might not, in his case, have—— But it would never have done to suggest that. Mrs. Courboys would have opened her large violet-grey eyes in shocked incredulity, and referred me to Scripture authorities on the duties of wives towards husbands. She had been admirably brought up—indeed,

was the daughter of an Anglican dean, whose exalted connections, wealthy patrons, and handsome income made it possible for him to prefer Gregorian chants, wear embroidered copes, burn candles and incense, and intone the Church of England service, without danger of being dropped upon by a Bishop of Broad-Church views and plebeian ancestry. The Dean did not interfere in the quarrels between his daughter and her husband. His was the policy of peace at any price, and he had travelled too far upon the ancient road to believe in divorce—now persistently demanded. According to a letter scrawled on mauve paper, which lay at this psychological moment crumpled up in a corner of Mrs. Courboys' drawing-room fender, the Dean was at that moment engaged in supplicating pardon from above for an injured but erring daughter.

"Prayin' ! oh, yes ; I know all about that kind of prayin' !" scoffed Courboys, picking up the crumpled ball of paper and smoothing it out, with a curiosity I would have rebuked as lack of breeding had the rebuke been likely to be of effect. "Seen him at it ! He wants to be out of the racket, that's all. And he is ! Sittin' snoring in the armchair in his study with a *Times* over his head ! I could do some of that kind of prayin' for a hatful of monkey-nuts !"

And as Courboys finished this declaration of scepticism with regard to the merits of a father-in-law worshipped by the entire feminine population of a Midland manufacturing city as a saint, the saint's daughter swept into the little dainty drawing-room bright with Indian wall-paper, dadoed with peacocks'-tails—considered by some superstitious persons as inimical to the welfare of a home—Morris chintz, green bronze electroliers, blue Japanese pottery, and Wardour Street Chippendale ; and, pinning me with her eye as a witness, asked quietly for a separation. Had she gulped and blinked after the fashion of hysterical

women, had she chewed her handkerchief to pulp or rent it into ribbons, had she roundly denounced Courboys as a scamp and a reprobate, one could have prophesied a renewal of kindness at no distant date. But her tone was so calm, her attitude so determined, that the little rift within the lute gaped wide as the spacious Gothic doorway of the Law Courts in the Strand; and one saw Courboys, his domestic cable cut, spinning down the river of ruin, in company with—how many brazen vessels?

“By Jingo!” ejaculated Courboys. “It seems as if you’d made up your mind!”

Mrs. Courboys gave her whilom tyrant a quiet glance. She seemed in this moment of complete and justifiable revolution, prettier than I had ever seen her. She had on a beautifully cut gown, cream cloth trimmed with sable, and violets clustered in a dainty little toque that crowned her wheat-coloured waves of hair. Her eyes were living sapphires gleaming from under levelled brows, her prettily moulded chin was firmly set in her black satin eravat. I despised Courboys, but when Courboys tried to temporize—I comprehended.

“Allie!” he said, after a blank contemplation of the bachelor future in view—“Allie!”—her name was Alice—“can’t we make terms? I may be a frisky husband, but upon my solemn, I’m a faithful one! and if you’re willin’ to overlook things, I’ll undertake you won’t regret——”

“I have overlooked things,” said Mrs. Courboys, “and I have invariably regretted having done so. Now I furnish myself with material for self-congratulation, my dear Ernest, in separating my life from yours. Build with the birds of night, drink from the streams of dissipation, henceforth, as you will. You will have no wife to be a clog upon your pleasures. . . . I shall possess no husband to be my children’s evil example—though he exists as their lasting disgrace!”

The look that accompanied the closing sentence was annihilating. It literally swept the insect Courboys, from the earth on which he crawled, over the verge of nothingness. He began—nay, he had already begun—to cave in, and sued for pardon at any price.

“I’ll cut bridge and baccarat and bettin’ and—and—disreputable pals. I swear I will! I’ll never call on Mrs. Brill-Williams—hang the woman!—again. I’ll drop Lady Turnabout”—Lady Turnabout was a sprightly peeress who, having been freed by a decree *nisi* from the conventionalities of good society, had “come out” at what are known as “the Halls,” nightly kicking the hat of notoriety from the brows of professionalism with the toe of emancipation—“I’ll give ‘em both the chuck, upon my soul I will! Will that do, or won’t it?” he shrieked.

When the man is reduced to shrieking, while the woman maintains her ordinary vocal level, victory, upon her side, is a sure and certain thing. She may push her advantage to the utmost, and demand the head upon a charger. Mrs. Courboys reflected for the shadow of an instant, then said :

“And will you give up Toto?”

Courboys was driven, by this apparently trivial request, to frenzy.

“By Jingo, Jack,” he yelled—let me explain that my friends usually call me Jack—“by Jingo! she wants me to part with the parrot.”

“You avowed your willingness to have done with all your disreputable companions,” said his wife, with icy scorn.

At this I rashly interceded.

“My dear Mrs. Courboys,” I began, fixing my eyeglass firmly, and bringing the most soothing inflections of my voice to the aid of the expostulation, “is not this a little—a little unreasonable? Ernest has had that bird for years. It was given to him by Lord Alfred Waster, his chief, upon

his dying bed, at Monte Carlo. Comfortably packed in his special travelling cage, Toto had accompanied his late master wherever duty called : Paris, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Madrid, New York, San Francisco, Barbadoes, Hawaii, Japan—”

“ And I swore I’d never part with him, and I’m dashed if I do !” asserted Courboys.

His wife retorted :

“ You have announced, finally, your intention to reform, as the result of my equally final determination to separate from you. While you keep that bird, you will never be anything but what you are now. Kill it, get rid of it in what way you choose, so that I may no longer hear its loathsome voice—feel its hateful presence near me. You have my last word upon the subject. Either you part with Toto as well as your other degrading and degraded associates—or I part with you !”

And the white cloth and sable costume, containing a woman who had made up her mind, swept from the drawing-room.

Courboys dropped heavily into an armchair, driving it back against the peacock dado with a crash, and exclaimed :

“ By George, she’s put her foot down ! And Toto’s got to go !”

She had put her foot down, it was plain to the most casual observer. Had I been in the shoes she graced, I should have preferred keeping Toto to keeping Courboys, for the bird, a large grey, red-crested parrot, with which I possessed a superficial acquaintance, was really a handsome and creditable specimen of its kind. But women, even the most enlightened, will be women at times, and clearly Toto must be sacrificed upon the altar dedicated to Courboys’ domestic gods.

“ Come into the study and have a look at him,” his depressed proprietor requested, and I went.

The apartment, panelled and furnished with fumed oak, upholstered in morocco leather, boasted a complete set of foils and single-sticks, some sporting double-barrels and angling-rods, the *Turf Magazine* from 1850, *Ruff's Guide*, *The Racing Calendar*, *Youatt on the Horse*, *The Stud Book*, *Hoyle*, *Briggs on Bridge*, and a collection of nude statuettes in bronze paste. There were a good many of the more daring republications of Pickleson, luxuriously bound; a lot of French novels, old and new, brightly yellow outside and deeply, darkly, beautifully blue within; and a good many water-colours of the modern Gallic school. Altogether, the room was a simple, candid admission of the tastes and habits of its owner. In a huge gilded cage upon a window-table the big grey parrot sat muttering to himself over a partly-eaten Brazil nut he clutched in one scaly claw. He dropped the nut as his master drew near, flapped his broad wings and sidled to the bars, the onyx pupils of his topaz eyes contracting and dilating with welcome, his fluffed-up neck, erected crimson crest, and jet-black beak inclined for the expected caress.

Courboys scratched him regretfully.

"It's all up, Toto. . . . You've got the chuck, my poor old chappie," he said with unaffected regret.

Really Toto seemed to understand, for in a raucous screech of mingled anger and disgust he jerked out:

"Ha, ha, ha! The missus—the missus! Oh, lor'! Drat all women. S's's'! . . . cats! Drat 'em! S's's'! cats! Oh, lor'!" He ended with a peal of ribald laughter, and a remark in Spanish which, despite my slight and superficial acquaintance with that language, I recognized as glaringly unfit for publication. Then, as the bird danced upon his perch, whistling and flapping his great wings in defiance, as it seemed, of the edict of banishment, and contempt of the weakness of his master, Courboys turned to me.

"Jack, old man, be a Samaritan—and give the bird a home! It's no use fightin' against Fate. Allie has had her knife into him for years; now it's a choice between Toto and her. And——"

"You beggar—you poor beggar!" said Toto, in a low, grating voice, as Courboys' gesture indicated which he had chosen.

Then the bird bleated like a lamb, an insult which went home, for Courboys, with a movement of anger, threw over the cage a large, green cloth cover, and reduced its resentful occupant to silence.

I was shaking with repressed emotion, but I composed my features and met Courboys' glance of entreaty with an expression at once sympathetic and grave. I had no objection, I informed him, to afford Toto a temporary refuge at my Dover Street flat until a permanent asylum could be arranged. My housekeeper was an excellent woman, fond of animals and birds, and if matters could be managed between Toto and her Persian cat——

Courboys seemed to think the odds were in favour of Toto. He gave me a great many hints with regard to the proper manner of bathing the parrot, of drying him; of keeping him warm, of keeping him cool; of preserving both his person and his cage free from parasites; and drew me up a dietary schedule, upon a half-sheet of foolscap, which enumerated, not only the various things which were good for Toto, but those which were not. Then we sent for a four-wheeled cab, and as a surprised and apparently gratified servant removed the green-cloth-obscured cage from the window-table, Courboys lifted a corner of the cover with a trembling hand.

"Good-bye, old ehappie. I'm infernally sorry, but it's got to be!" he stuttered.

There was no response beyond a low, contemptuous chuckle. But when the jingling growler was well on its

way to Dover Street, I, sitting opposite the shrouded dwelling of the disturber of Courboys' domestic peace, delicately inserted the end of my cane, and found it vigorously grabbed by a bill of iron. . . . A moment later, and as Toto, disappointed of the anticipated finger, whistled shrilly, the cab drew up in Dover Street. The driver, a shiny bundle of oilskins, rolled from his perch and opened the door, and, by the joint efforts of Jehu and porter, Toto, not without extracting tribute of human gore, was extracted from the cab, put into the lift, and finally deposited on the table in my dining-room.

"You will be getting quite a stay-at-home soon, sir, with that dear, intelligent creature to keep you company!" said my housekeeper, who had fallen instantly a victim to the meretricious charms of Lord Alfred's legacy. Have I mentioned that I am elderly, and that my housekeeper was selected for me by an aunt who takes an almost maternal interest in my welfare? "Pretty Polly!" Mrs. Smale continued, "serateh-a-poll, Polly!"

But Toto pondered, with his head on one side, and made no response to these affectionate overtures. The unhappy woman became more assiduous, pressing a lump of sugar on the reluctant bird. Then Toto, smarting from the severance of home ties and the unjust sentence of banishment under which he laboured, shook out his feathers, looked Mrs. Smale cynically in the face, and uttered three words, the effect of which was to send the good woman, cherry-red and snorting with indignation, from the room.

I thought it time to expostulate, and did so; but Toto only drew eorks, champagne for choice, and I had not yet dined. Mrs. Smale was a capital cook; and under the advice of the aunt before mentioned, who lived in Hanover Square, and from whom I reasonably expected to inherit a considerable sum in Rails and Consols, with the house in

Hanover Square and a few other desirable plums out of this world's pudding, I had of late frequented the club less regularly. As I changed for dinner it occurred to me that I would, for once, abandon the whisky and Oxygenaris recommended by my doctor, and have instead a bottle of a dry and super-excellent vintage of which I possessed a small stock. Mathewson, my servant, an old butler of Aunt Harriet's, who waited upon and dressed me as though I were her property rather than my own, shook his head upon receiving my order, but I pretended not to see. And I sat down to dinner.

In the middle of grace, which I made a point of saying, the champagne-cork was explosively drawn, and I shook my head at Mathewson.

"It was the bird, sir!" explained Mathewson, purple with wounded feeling.

Toto was dancing in his cage, but as Mathewson shook his fist at him he drove his sledge-hammer beak against the cage-wires and shrieked three saw-edged shrieks of defiance. The hand of Mathewson trembled as he filled my glass with the creaming wine, and—

"A half-bottle! . . . I ordered a whole one. Get out another, please," I said.

"You'll be worse for it to-morrow, Master—Mr. John!" pleaded Mathewson.

In my soul I knew that the prediction would be fulfilled, and had not Toto at that psychological moment bleated like a lamb, my instant of hesitation would have ended in revocation of the order. But the mockery conveyed in Toto's imitation, and the contempt that glared from his round eye, decided me.

"Get out another bottle, please," I repeated. "A whole one!"

And as the astounded and scandalized Mathewson departed to fulfil the order, Toto burst into a fit of triumphant,

shrill laughter. "Who's afraid?" he demanded, then drew more corks and sang a stave of "Merrily Danced the Quaker's Wife." The Quaker was pointedly meant for Mathewson. I went over to Toto's cage and gave him a banana, and was rewarded by a "Thank you, ducky," and a scrap of a French drinking song :

"Quoi de plus doux  
Que les glougloux—  
Les glougloux du vin a quat' sous?"

"Only it isn't *vin a quatre sous*," I said, as I returned to table, "but 'Pol Georges, Carte d'Or, Extra Sec, Black Foil, 1890, at a hundred and sixty shillings.'"

"*Haye!*" said Toto, in excellent Japanese.

"You won't go to the club to-night, Master—Mr. John?" said Mathewson, who had returned with an imperial pint of the Pol Georges.

"I may look in," I replied, with the bravado of indifference. And Mathewson sighed and opened the fresh bottle with a martyred air.

I chose a cigar and settled down on my divan with the evening paper. I did not really intend going to the club. But as time waned and the bottle emptied, I was conscious of a brisk inclination to sociability. Movement, stir, excitement, agreeable suspense of some kind were suggested in their turn by a peculiar noise Toto was making. Over and over again it came—imitated to perfection—the click and rattle of a roulette ball, the monotonous repetitions of the croupier, the chink of money thrown down, pushed out or raked in. I am not a gambler, but I enjoy games of chance, and Courboys had once or twice invited me to accompany him to a certain top-floor flat in Ego Street, where, after the 'witching hour, what the prodigal termed "a little flutter" at roulette and baccarat might be had. I recalled the single evening I had spent at Ego Street, and the sum I had won, some twenty sovereigns, and the in-

elination to look in again for ten minutes became overpowering. I got off the divan, ascertained that I had sufficient cash upon me, and moved to the door.

"Going out, Master—Mr. John?" sighed Mathewson, emerging from his lair as I reached down my hat and overcoat from the hall-rack. I turned on him an eye as glassy and as brazen as Toto's own.

"I am going out. Don't sit up, please," I added, very distinctly.

But Mathewson disobeyed orders. His eye upon the following day spoke volumes, and, tortured as I was by twinges of rheumatism, I endeavoured to hide, as far as possible, my sufferings from the aged man. A certain heaviness in the head and a coy shrinking from food I boldly ascribed to a change in the weather, and a bilious tinge perceptible in my complexion I put down to a salad-dressing compounded the previous day, from my aunt's own recipe, by Mrs. Smale. In these glaring unveracities Toto was my upholder and abettor.

"I don't care for you!" he brazenly replied, when ex-postulated with by my indignant housekeeper. "Have a little drop of brandy, do!" It was with an admirable imitation of Mrs. Smale's own voice that Toto conveyed the hospitable invitation, and she smiled, perforce in tribute to the talent of the bird. But when Toto proceeded to kiss; smack, return-smack and counter, she lost patience, bridled, and grew palpably confused. Delighted with the effect produced, Toto persevered, until a kiss of a peculiarly succulent and prolonged description drove the incensed widow from the room.

The rest of the day passed quietly, Stanistreet, an old University chum, dropping in after dinner to play a game of chess. But the game flagged, owing to Toto. He kissed the entire evening, ringing the changes—sounding the entire gamut of osculation in a style reminiscent of Bathyllus.

He kissed coyly, provokingly, warmly, uxoriously. The kiss explosive, punctuated by "Don't!" and immediately followed by another salute, even more suggestive of the detonation of gun-cotton, was, perhaps, his triumph. It broke up the evening, Stanistreet, a red-haired man, recently married, posting his rooks with such culpable carelessness that he lost the game from the very outset, and went home to Mrs. Stanistreet in a cab, though the distance between Dover Street and Norfolk Street, Park Lane, is scarcely worth mentioning. Naturally annoyed at the premature breaking-up of what had promised to be a social evening, I looked in at the Alhambra for a turn or two, encountering Courboys in the promenade.

"I'm in a private box with the missus," he explained. Then he asked after Toto. "It's a sacrifice," he sighed, with a shake of his little bullet head, "but it's done the trick, Jack, my boy! Alice always said that bird was enough to corrupt a regiment. Fact, by Jove!"

Mrs. Courboys probably said so again that evening, for her eye, when I met her in the Park on the following Sunday, was glacially severe. Courboys was with her, carrying a "Church Service" and lifting her white Pomeranian over the puddles with quite pre-nuptial devotion. One saw that here was a link renewed, and felt that, in bringing about the reunion of these two married people, one had done something to be, perhaps, a little proud of. Not that one had ever posed as a moralist, ever brandishing one's own lofty principles, delicate scruples, and high standard of conduct in the face of society—so content as a rule to accept people without these, provided they are smart, well-looking, well-bred, and well-moneyed. But still—

An umbrella-ferrule poked me in what is vulgarly known as "the small" of the back. I turned round, to recognize Aunt Harriet's companion, Miss Hake, a little mouse-coloured woman with watery eyes, perpetually dressed in

black trimmed with jet beads, regarding me with the expression of a martyr.

"Mr. John! . . ." she gasped.

My aunt's spacious terra-cotta landau, back down, front up, drawn by the two fat greys and driven by a septuagenarian coachman, was waiting; aunt's bonnet was observing us; aunt's stout hand, encased in a violet kid glove, imperiously waved us to approach.

"My dear Miss Hake," I began, for the little woman could not repress her agitation. I have reason to believe that Miss Hake regards me with something warmer than mere esteem, and that she cherishes in a locket attached to her old-fashioned snake watch-chain a piece of hair which, to confess, is a different colour from that I am wearing now.

"Oh, Mr. John!" she gasped again, "you have been terribly rash of late, and things have reached us—which—" She turned up her poor damp eyes to express the things unspeakable, and swallowed a sob. "You will be questioned—you know, everybody knows what your aunt is when put out. Be careful. Oh, be careful! She has written to her lawyers—she—"

But we were beckoned by the imperious purple gloves into the ark of a landau, and rolling out at Grosvenor Gate before I could frame a question or collect my ideas. And the septuagenarian coachman, evidently under previous orders, drove us straight to Dover Street.

We ascended in the lift, Aunt Harriet seated, her purple gloves outspread upon her violet satin lap, the crimson roses in her green bonnet nodding forebodings, Miss Hake standing by, ready, at a moment's notice, to administer red lavender and apply salts. The traitor Mathewson opened the door, and started in affected surprise; the faithless Smale appeared with a face dimpled with welcoming smiles. My aunt made for the dining-room, where

Toto was engaged in giving a spirited imitation of a cat-fight.

"Is this the creature?" she exclaimed.

Toto, catching sight of her, broke off, his lower mandible dropping, his round eyes glaring with astonishment. I believe he was under the impression, at first, that a relative from the Valley of the Amazon had come to call. It was plainly time for me to speak.

"My dear Aunt Harriet," I began, "may I presume at length to ask the reason of your very apparent agitation, and the evident prejudice you display towards this bird, of which I do not remember ever having spoken to you before?"

"John," my aunt replied, seating herself with her back carefully turned to Toto, "why should I seek to hide, or they be ashamed of it? I have heard certain things from Mrs. Smale and Mathewson, old servants who take a genuinely affectionate interest in you, and not spies, as you are pleased to call them!" I had not opened my lips. "I am horrified to hear that you have—give me the salts, Hake—on several occasions within the last fortnight—returned home at three, four, and four-thirty ante-meridian, and once not at all!"

"My dear aunt," I permitted myself to remark, as Aunt Harriet shuddered violently, "if I had not returned at all I could not be here now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" broke in Toto, as Aunt Harriet glared at me speechlessly. "Poor old boy, silly old fool! Miaow, miaow, molriaow! Cats! S's's!"

"Even the bird laughs, John, at the puerility of your attempt to turn the conversation," said Aunt Harriet, with flaming cheeks. Her very bonnet trembled with indignation, and she clenched her hands so violently to restrain the words that surged behind her expensive American teeth that she split the back of one of her purple

gloves and a button flew off the other. "Whence you obtained the creature I do not know; but from all that Smale and Mathewson have reported to me, I should judge that it has been bred amid the lowest surroundings. Your partiality for its conversation evinces the coarseness of your tastes. Mercy upon us! How I have been deceived in you! But it is not too late. I have still time to select an heir from my brother Edward's family"—Aunt Harriet had always loathed Uncle Edward—"and to alter my will."

Nothing but the recollection of that snug sum invested in Home Rails, of those thriving three per cent. Government securities, and the house in Hanover Square, could have bent my stubborn nature to the extent of pacifying aunt with an admission of my recent backslidings, and a promise of amendment. That I furnished my despotic relative with the smallest amount of actual fact which might be held to constitute the entire truth may be conjectured. The excuse that Toto had urged me to the commission of the regrettable imprudences I refrained from making. He, by dint of leering at Aunt Harriet and entreating her, whenever her glance visited his cage, to have a drop of brandy, was fast establishing over the spinster lady the diabolical fascination to which I can to-day attribute the unsatisfactory condition of my pecuniary affairs. She accepted my excuses, my vows of reformation; she permitted me, as the seal of our reconciliation, to press my lips upon her cheek; she scratched Toto's head at his pressing invitation, and swept out of my little dining-room in a purple cloud of satin. Faded Miss Hake and I brought up the rear; the little woman's eyes were more watery than usual, as she congratulated me upon my escape.

"Oh, Mr. John!" she breathed, in a soft, agitated tone. A smacking kiss that cracked like the report of a saloon-

pistol followed on the words ; and Aunt Harriet pirouetted round in the doorway with a scream of indignation !

Toto had ruined me. All was over. In vain Miss Hake wept, in vain I asseverated my innocence and hers.

“ You—you libertine ! Behind my very back you corrupt a creature who has eaten my bread and enjoyed my protection for twenty years ! Had I not heard with my very own ears, I should never have credited it—never !”

Endurance had been taxed too far. As Miss Hake went down in hysterics on my Turkey rug, I seized a heavy metal paper-cutter and rushed at Toto’s cage. But a podgy hand in a burst violet glove grasped me vigorously by the arm that was uplifted to destroy the fiend-possessed author of my ruin.

“ Kill the bird—the creature you have fed and cherished,—to gratify your malevolence ! . . . I forbid you to touch a hair of its head !” Aunt shrieked. “ Stand aside, sir ! Mathewson, carry this cage downstairs and put it in the carriage. As for that creature,” she indicated the unhappy Hake, sniffing feebly at the salts-bottle held and administered by Mrs. Smale, “ a quarter’s salary shall be sent to any address she chooses to forward. Never, either of you, darken my doors again !”

And Aunt Harriet, in a whirlwind of rage, shook the dust of Dover Street from her large-sized shoe-soles, and, having dismissed her companion and disowned her nephew at one blow, went home to luncheon.

Years have fled. Courboys has become a model husband. I am a poor man, not because Aunt Harriet remained obstinate—our misunderstanding was cleared up some years previous to her death—but because that once wealthy spinster died bankrupt, having gambled away her entire fortune at the tables of Baden Baden and Monte Carlo. The Italian ex-croupier, passing as an Austro-

Hungarian Grand Duke, with whom the unhappy old lady contracted a romantic marriage, turned out to have been previously married to a tobacconist's saleswoman at Nice, and the family got rid of him with the slightest possible difficulty.

Toto the tempter—to whom I unhesitatingly ascribe Courboys's deviations from virtue, my own imprudent conduct, and my unfortunate relative's lapse from strict propriety—Toto remains in the possession of the Signor ; from which fact I reap the expectation that he will infallibly end in prison or at the galleys. To harbour a parrot of talents like to Toto's is to tempt Destiny and court Fate.

## XIII

### CLAIRVOYANCE

"LET'S get through with the correspondence, there's a love!" urged Miss Predicta. "I've six important appointments, to read the future between eleven-thirty and lunch, besides the chance callers that may drop in. By the way, what do you think of the new door-plate, 'Predicta' in big black letters, and nothing else?"

"The most strikingest thing in the line I ever see, Jenny dear!" said the typist, clicking back the bar and ringing a little bell, as she slid a sheet of paper into the machine.

"Most striking," please; and don't call me Jenny in business hours," said Miss Predicta freezingly. Then she dictated :

BOND STREET.

"MADAM,—

"We regret to hear that the crystal supplied does not show coming events as clearly as you could wish. We are quite ready on its return, accompanied by your cheque or P.O. for ten shillings extra, to supply the more expensive Himalayan article, as used by the leading Mahatmas."

"Be careful about your spelling, as this is a doctor's wife in a country town. If she was a Duchess it wouldn't matter!" said Miss Predicta.

"That word always bothers me," said the typist, stopping to use the india-rubber. "Six different ways I've spelt Mahatma—in one letter alone—and not one of 'em turned out right. But you always was the clever one of us two,

in spelling and everything else. There's the client's bell, Jenny dear!"

"Jenny dear" jumped up as a telephone-bell whirred, and, unhooking the receiver, listened to the wiry voice that came from the ground-floor.

"C.C.S.A.T.L.L.C.," ticked the telephone in Miss Predicta's private alphabetical cypher-code.

"Casual Caller, Swell About Town, Looks Like Cash," translated Miss Predicta mentally. She glided between the plush curtains into the bower of mystery, and had barely time to fall upon a chair painted with cabalistic characters and plunge into a profound reverie before the Casual Caller appeared. He was tall, tawny, square-shouldered, attired in accurately cut morning tweeds, and brought with him the last whiff of the Havana thrown away upon Miss Predicta's threshold.

"Haw!" said he, with an air of polite embarrassment. "I was told—that is——"

His eye took in an interior chastely draped and decorated in red, carefully screened from the light of day, and illuminated by an electric star in the ceiling.

"Haw!" he said again.

Miss Predicta opened her eyes, two deep blue wells of mystery, and pushed a chestnut-tinted mass of carefully disarranged hair from her brow. Robed in a black velvet tea-gown trimmed with cheap imitation point, she certainly looked spiritual, if not mystical.

"You wished to know something of what the Future holds in store for you, sir?"

"'Pon my word!" said the Casual Caller, putting a well-groomed hard felt hat on the little centre table covered with a cabalistic cloth, "I can't quite say. Your door-plate caught my eye in passing. A young man—pimply boy rather—asked me to walk in, and then said the charge was half-a-crown to see the clairvoyante."

"To see the clairvoyante. But our fee for reading the Future is half-a-guinea," said Miss Predicta.

"The matter with my future is—it's painfully clear," said the Casual Caller, thoughtfully.

"Army," ticked off Miss Predicta, mentally noting the regimental colours of his tie, the tanned muscular hands, and the white strip of forehead above the healthy sunburn of his pleasant countenance.

"Originally *magasin*," silently observed the Casual Caller. "Millinery or Mantles. Had ambitions. . . . Wonder who helped her to this start?"

"If you were about to engage in any enterprise, the clairvoyante might advise," said Miss Predicta.

"Mine is not," said the Casual Caller gravely, "an enterprising disposition."

"Or if you wanted to invest money! . . . Bet on a race, for instance," Miss Predicta hazarded.

"Do you foretell winners?" the Casual Caller asked with interest.

"Occasionally," said Miss Predicta, guardedly.

"It must spoil a man's fun to know beforehand that his beast is going to tootle in Number One," said the Casual Caller. "No; I don't think I'll invest to-day."

"We supply horoscopes, character and marriage charts," said Miss Predicta, alluringly, "at reasonable prices."

"Suppose a husband steers by one of your marriage-charts, and strikes reef in a spot where none is marked," the Casual Caller queried, "does he sue you for damages, or do you shirk responsibility?"

"We instruct in the science of Hypnotism," said Miss Predicta. "Perhaps you might care to take a course of lessons? Or, if you have lost a relative or dear friend, whom you cannot trace, the clairvoyante might possibly put you on the track."

"By Jove! Now you remind me," said the Casual Caller, "I have lost a friend. Quite lately too."

"Then," suggested Miss Predicta, pushing a papier mâché skull money-box across the little table, "if you wish to consult the clairvoyante, our charge is ten-and-six." From force of habit she nearly added "three-farthings."

"Pretty idea that!" said the Casual Caller, as he extracted half a sovereign and sixpence from his waistcoat-pocket and dropped them into the skull. "So cheery!"

He added: "I may presume, then, that I have the pleasure of addressing you as a clairvoyante?"

"Would you kindly remove your hat?" said Miss Predicta, preparing to dive into the future.

"Certainly. I beg your pardon." The Casual Caller transferred his hat to a chair. "You ladies are running us close," he observed. "Nothing for the men to do soon, positively. My sister patronizes a lady-chemist; most of the business men I know employ lady secretaries. I sent off a wireless message just now; the operator was a young lady-handed me change for a fiver, two shillings short—with a perfectly charmin' smile. Dropped in at my gun-maker's to be fitted for a new gun, and was measured for a sporting double self-ejectin' breech-loader by a young woman who knocked the clay birds over right and left, quite like a professional shootist. Haw!"

Miss Predicta drew a little wand of black wood with an open hand at the end of it from behind the cushion of her chair. She pointed this at the electric ceiling-star, and with the assistance of a switch under the table the lights became a cheerless blue.

"I say—what!" exclaimed the Casual Caller.

"I must ask you not to talk," said Miss Predicta, severely. "The spirits object to idle conversation," she added.

"In business hours—quite correct!" nodded the Casual Caller.

Miss Predicta, hoping to induce awe, pedalled the foot-switch, and the lights went green.

"Do the spirits do that?" inquired the Casual Caller. "Because," he added, as Miss Predicta bowed her head in assent, "I wish you would kindly ask 'em to select a more becoming colour." As the light revolved to rose, he added, "That's awfully nice; thanks such a lot!" and Miss Predicta felt herself blush slightly under the appreciative directness of his gaze. Her hand shook a little as she lighted a pastille in an imitation Satsuma incense-burner.

"Phew! I say, do the spirits really want a smell of that kind?" objected the Casual Caller. "Because, if not——"

Miss Predicta, whose gaze was professionally fixed, made no reply. The pastille sent up a nasty little fume; the roar of Bond Street came through the red curtains. . . . Suddenly the Casual Caller sneezed.

"Couldn't help it, upon my word," said he, in muffled tones filtered through a silk handkerchief of the newest shade. "Wonder the spirits stand it, by Jove I do!"

"I must really ask you not to talk!" said Miss Predicta. She placed a crystal ball on an ebony stand upon the table, and snapped the lights out. The crystal shone moonily in the obscurity. "Now think of your lost friend," ordered Miss Predicta in a voice effectively hollow. "Think—and I will gaze in the magic ball and tell you what I see."

The Casual Caller bent over the table. The faces of the inquirer and of the seeress were conjecturally six inches apart. The perfume of excellent cigars, mingled with the blameless odour of clean linen and a twang of Russia leather saluted Miss Predicta's nostrils in agreeable whiffs. The Casual Caller on his part was aware of violet soap, pearl powder, singed hair—Miss Predicta had used the

undulators too hot that morning—and the searching fragrance of a sweetmeat dear to him in youth.

"Now tell me your thoughts," said Miss Predicta.

"Do all prophetesses eat peppermints?" asked the Casual Caller.

"You are rude, I must say!" said Miss Predicta huffily.

"You wanted to know what I was thinking," said the Casual Caller apologetically. "And that was what I thought."

"Oh! but you mustn't think about me," said Miss Predicta with some coquetry. "Think about the friend you have lost. Keep on thinking quite hard!"

"I do . . . I am!" said the Casual Caller.

"Man?" queried Miss Predicta, "or woman?"

"She was a dear little thing!" said the Casual Caller. His voice shook.

"Woman!" said Miss Predicta lucidly. "Of what complexion," she added—"blonde or brunette?"

For a moment the Casual Caller did not appear able to reply. The little table shook and the crystal quivered.

"He loves her still," thought Miss Predicta, "no matter how she's treated him. Some people do have luck!" She repeated her interrogation. "Was she dark or fair, or neither the one nor the other—like me?"

The table shook again slightly. Then—"She had brown eyes," said the Casual Caller chokily.

"Did you consider she was very attached?" queried Miss Predicta. "It looks, in the crystal," she added, "as if the love was more on one side than the other. Was she fond of you?"

The Casual Caller replied in muffled tones: "Awfully. Used to go with me everywhere, and, if I happened to go out without her, sit watching for hours for me to come back."

"And did her love die out suddenly?" asked Miss Pre-

dicta, peering into the crystal. "There's a blur here that seems like a change. And brown-eyed women are very deceitful."

"I came home one day——" The Casual Caller faltered.

"And found her out?" interrogated Miss Predicta.

"Found her gone," gasped the Casual Caller. The table not only shook, but creaked, and Miss Predicta, who had read in novels of the agony of a strong man in sorrow, swallowed a sigh.

"She had deserted you?" she hinted. "It looks like it—in the crystal!"

"She had broken her chain," said the Casual Caller gloomily, "and bolted out of the house."

"There *was* a chain, then?" the seeress hinted.

"I beg your pardon," said the Casual Caller.

"How long had you been married?" asked Miss Predicta boldly.

"Not long," said the Casual Caller.

"Quite recently?" asked Miss Predicta.

"So recently," said the Casual Caller, "that the affair hasn't come off yet. I happen to be a bachelor. Haw!"

"Oh, I never! . . . You really——" Miss Predicta tingled to her finger-tips with indignation at this shameless effrontery. "So good-looking," she thought, "to be such a wretch!" "But there's a wedding in the crystal," she resumed. "I can see a Bishop's sleeves and a lot of white flowers, and—certainly there's a cake. Yes, without doubt, a cake!"

"Perhaps it's your wedding," said the Casual Caller, "and your cake?"

"It's your future," said Miss Predicta, freezing. "Did you endeavour to trace her?" she continued, "the poor unhappy creature with the brown eyes who fled from the shelter of your roof when she broke the chain that—you know! Of course, you've tried to trace her?"

"Hunted everywhere," said the Casual Caller. "Advertised. Went round to all my friends' rooms on the chance of tumbling over her."

"Oh!" gasped Miss Predicta. "The idea!"

"That was one of her chief faults. Would go to people's houses she'd taken a fancy to," said the Casual Caller. "Nothing could break her of it!"

Miss Predicta's eyebrows went up under cover of the darkness.

"But when she never turned up I had to come to the conclusion she'd been kidnapped," continued the Casual Caller. "Mothers are hardly likely to run away, you know, when there are two podgy, round-bodied little beggars rolling on the hearthrug and whimpering for her to come back."

"A mother," observed Miss Predicta sarcastically, "but some women have no natural feeling. Two innocent babies abandoned! When she might have put 'em into their perambulator, and taken them too! I say it's a shame!"

The table quivered convulsively. In the obscurity Miss Predicta became aware that the Casual Caller had pulled out his handkerchief and was mopping his eyes.

"Th-thank you!" he gasped. "It does seem unnatural, doesn't it? Perhaps you would kindly look into the crystal and try whether you can get a glimpse of her?"

"What was her Christian name?" demanded Miss Predicta, relieved to find that the profligate's better nature was asserting itself at last.

"I called her 'Floss,'" gurgled the Casual Caller.

"There was no quarrel previous to her disappearance?" hinted Miss Predicta.

"No. N-no," hesitated the Casual Caller. "Except—but you couldn't call that a quarrel!"

"Couldn't call what?"

"What took place," said the Casual Caller. "I'd told the little beast to fetch my gloves—a thing she'd done thousands of times. She disobeyed me, and I gave her a cut with a riding-cane. That's all!"

"You brute!" rose to Miss Predicta's lips, but she kept the words back with an effort. All her sympathies went out to the woman—the mother, who had suffered outrage at this aristocrat's ruthless hands. She bent over the crystal, resolved to awaken his dormant conscience at the expense of veracity. "Silence, please!" she said. "The shadows begin to clear. Now they move aside. What is this?" At the cue, started by the typist in the next room, a musical-box began to discourse the "Shadow Dance" from *Dinorah*.

"I see," continued Miss Predicta, "a lonely road. The figure of a woman, distraught and terror-stricken, recedes into the distance. Her face is turned from me. Now she looks back. She has brown eyes. Was she wearing a sable fur when she disappeared?"

The table rocked violently. After an interval of struggle the Casual Caller managed to say: "No, dog-skin—with a head and one tail."

"They call it European fox," said Miss Predicta severely. She thought he might have bought something better than that for the helpless creature who had sacrificed all for him. Now she lifted her hand dramatically as she cried: "The scene changes! I see a garret room with a bed. The same woman lies upon it. A doctor bends over her. A reverend-looking gentleman with white hair enters. Listen—she speaks! 'Tell him that I forgive him,' she falters—'him, the author of my misery and ruin!'" The musical-box broke off the "Shadow Dance" and clicked into "Abide with me." "'Entreat him to take care of my poor, deserted, nameless children!—to marry a better woman!—to see that my grave is kept green, and for the future lead a blameless life!'" She sinks back. I hear the death-rattle. All is over! Unhappy Floss is no more!"

Miss Predicta switched up the lights and confronted the crimson face and tear-distilling eyes of the Casual Caller.

"Th-thank you so awf-awfully!" he stammered; "but you've made one mistake. The—the children aren't nameless. One is called 'Waggle' and the other 'Dash.' And Floss happens to be a liver-and-white Clumber spaniel—a Palace Cup winner—I value very much. But I'm uncommonly obliged, all the same. Most interesting séance!"

Miss Predicta faced him, with poppy-red cheeks and blazing eyes. The musical-box left off before "Amen." "Do you want your money back?" she demanded. "Do you mean to spread about how you came in and guyed—and made a fool of me when I thought—"

"When you thought you were making a fool of *me*? My dear young lady, don't be alarmed!" said the Casual Caller. "As to injuring you in the clairvoyante business, I shall make a point of sendin' in my friends. If they enjoy themselves as much as I have done—" His shoulders shook again. "But you make one mistake. Shouldn't take it for granted that every man who wears a decent coat and—and necktie is a blackguard. No, by Jove!" He shook his head and put his hat upon it. "Good-morning, Miss—ahem!—Miss Clairvoyante."

Miss Predicta, with tear-blurred vision, saw the Casual Caller on the steps of departure. "Good-morning. And I truly beg your pardon. But whether you forgive me or not," she sighed, "I shall never see you again!"

"Would you care to?" The Casual Caller wheeled upon the threshold of the crimson temple, and as he smiled it seemed to Miss Predicta that the electric light had snapped back to rose. "Would you really? Haw! Because, if so—if you'd really—care to—see me again—you'd better—"

"Better?" gasped Miss Predicta, with a thumping heart.

"Better look in the Magic Crystal!" said the Casual Caller. "Good-day!"

## XIV

### IN THE LAGOON

SAVARAN might have been lost to society for some three years, when by some strange chance we light upon him among the low-lying coral islands of Torres Strait, painfully striving to wrest from eighteen fathoms of blue lagoon-water some small portion of that wealth which in his hey-day he had dissipated so wantonly.

Savaran, upon whom the title of the Fortunate Young Man had once been bestowed by universal acclamation—Savaran, only remembered now as “an extravagant poor devil who got broke and went out to Queensland” by men who had shared those good things which his gods, at the ripening of his twenty-third year, had lavished upon him—Savaran, once master of half a million, had invested the few poor hundreds salvaged from the general wreck in the purchase of the seventy-ton lugger-rigged vessel *Star of Hope*, fitted her with pumping-gear and diving apparatus, and started life anew as a trader in coral and pearl-shell, plying between the fishing-grounds of Western Australia and the New Guinea coast.

His indifference to personal risk and his superb physique stood him in good stead at this juncture. He was his own supercargo and sailing-master, and had learned to be his own diver. A complement of five made up his crew; four Manilla men and an Australian half-breed from Port Kennedy relieved each other at the pumps, and tended the life-lines. The present expedition had lasted a month; the vessel's hold contained copra, and store of shell; pro-

visions were running low ; and every day that burned in gold and crimson upon the horizon might herald the arrival of the Sydney purveyor's cutter bringing the necessary supplies.

It was a white-hot day ; the sky was cloudless and the breeze came out of the south-west too faintly to do more than feather the green plumes of the palms upon the atoll. The usual thunder of the breakers upon the outer reef had died to a low moaning ; the waters of the lagoon were like liquid opal. When the translucent surface rounded to a swell the lugger cradled at her cable, otherwise she hung still in a charmed silence, only broken by the shrill cries of fishing-birds. Many of these were of most gorgeous plumage ; and down in the lagoon depths, shoals of fishes, their rivals in brilliancy of hue, sported amidst forests of rainbow-tinted madrepores, whose living branches bathed themselves in sunlight filtered through the crystal medium of the tide.

The pumps stopped panting ; the man whose duty it was to tend the life-lines became galvanized into activity. Savaran came up from a depth of sixteen fathoms, like some pre-Adamite sea-monster, panoplied in carapace of solid steel, leaden-footed, helmeted with glowing copper, eyed with tremendous goggles of glass. Lengths of india-rubber tube, strengthened with iron wire, trailed behind him, and he carried a branch of black coral in one gauntleted hand.

The half-breed from Port Kennedy helped the diver over the bulwarks, coiled away the life-tackle, and unshipped the copper helmet. Relieved of its cumbrous weight, Savaran drew a long, enjoying inspiration of the hot, salt, sparkling air. Blood sprang and trickled from his ears and nostrils for the third time that day.

He gave a brief direction as he turned away. Two of the Manilla men went forward and busied themselves with

hauling up the diver's net. They sang a droning capstan chant as they gathered in the line, and the net came up with some twenty pairs of rough-backed shell in it, and a giant specimen of the *bêche de mer*. The slimy, Bologna-sausage shaped, gaudily-hued monstrosity was intended as a reinforcement for the cooking-pot. The teeth of the Manilla men watered as they handled it and thought of trepang curried.

It was mid-noon by now, and the sunshine scalded like molten gold. The pitched caulking hissed in the seams of the vessel ; metal things were insupportable to the touch of the naked hand. Labour was over for the day. The cook cleaned and seethed the trepang, and curried it with the usual ration of dried cod, and brought Savaran (now uncased from his diver's panoply) his portion steaming in a tin dipper, with snowy rice and two or three bananas, some hard sea biscuits, and a mug of coffee : and being hungry he ate, and drank, nor paused to remember the flesh-pots of Clubland.

In the heyday of his prosperity he had never been a dandy. Excellently well groomed, clothed with absolute grace and propriety, he had been the despair of the emulous and the admiration of the unenvying. But now he was clad in a sea-stained cotton jumper and trousers of coarse blue dungaree, and wore about his middle a gaudily-striped scarf of Papuan manufacture, in the folds of which his revolver and bowie-knife were thrust. In complexion he was tanned to the hue of the Manilla men, temple and cheek, throat and forearm having attained so tawny a shade that the lightness of his eyes conveyed an effect almost startling in its discrepancy ; and the long, unkempt locks of his hair, the ends of his straggling moustache, and the clipped edges of his pointed beard seemed white by contrast, bleached to the silvery paleness of ripe barley by the potent rays of a tropical sun.

That sun set in majesty of trailing gold and purple. Down in the stuffy forecastle, populous with cockroaches, the Manilla men, converts of the Catholic Missionaries, crossed themselves and said their evening prayers before a gaudily painted plaster medallion of Our Lady, which they had garlanded with a rosary of tiny rainbow-tinted shells and nailed against the bowsprit-end. Then they rolled themselves in their mats and fell asleep in their berths, while the purple darkness stole upon land and sea, and the great bright stars looked down upon their reflections mirrored in the lagoon.

And Savaran sat on deck and opened pearl-oysters. He never waited to rot shell, for reasons of his own, and he had attained to extraordinary expertness in the occupation—could have given points to any one of the white-aproned attendants who operate behind London oyster-bars, and beaten his opponent easily.

A lantern stood between his legs, and by the light of the tallow dip contained in it he plied his task. His well-accustomed fingers probed bivalve after bivalve, his brows never relaxed from their intent fold. At last he drew a quicker breath, tossed a dripping shell—the last—aside, and held something to the light: something he carefully shielded in the palm of his hollowed hand. It was a pearl, spherical in shape, weighing some twenty carats, and quite unblemished. Savaran looked at it scrutinizingly, put it in his mouth and sucked it, took it out and rubbed it carefully upon his sleeve. . . .

“In luck to-night!” he said grimly. “That’s worth three hundred, if a sovereign.” He drew from the breast of his shirt a chamois-leather bag that was suspended about his strong brown throat by a fine slender steel chain, dropped the treasure-trove in among its fellows, and hid it again quickly, fancying that curious eyes spied upon him from the cabin’s open companion-way. But he did not

glance about him to make sure ; to seem to harbour suspicion would have been injudicious. He got up and strode over the heap of *débris*, and went forward and stood in the bows, looking out over the star-gemmed waters, breathing in the perfumed breeze that blew from the shore.

"Three hundred pounds, at least!" he whispered again.  
"Another rung in the ladder ; another furlong in the race ; another day worked off the tale of hundreds that must dawn and darken, O my dearest ! before I earn the right to see your heavenly face again !"

Then his mood changed, and his diction, and he cursed his ill-luck as elaborately as he knew how. For it is ill-luck, most surely, that a man should only solve the mystery of love when he has found out how to spell ruin—become a crowned king at the identical moment when the clouted cloak of beggary falls upon his shoulders. Therefore Savaran swore, and found relief in the exercise. There, in the perfumed darkness of the Pacific night, under the purple-black canopy of heaven where the lamps of the great stars swung, he lifted his arms above his head in a desperate access of hungry, yearning, baffled human passion, and called upon the name of the woman he loved—for she seemed strangely near and agonizingly unattainable ; and the scent of her hair, and the velvet warmth of her cheek, and the thrilling touch of her hand, and the silken rustle of her gown, were present with him on this night more vividly than they had ever been, so that he sobbed with dry eyes, and cried aloud in torture.

"Nelia !" he cried ; "Nelia ! Wait for me ! Be true to me ! I am coming to you—coming soon ! Be patient ! Be faithful ! Ah, be faithful ! It—won't—won't be for long !"

When we are shut out of Paradise by an angel with a flaming sword, we weep and lament God's hard judgment

and find a dismal comfort in wondering why so sore a fate should have fallen upon our head. But when we have done the shutting-out ourselves there are no tears to shed ; we forged the flaming sword with our own hands, and the knowledge renders suffering more exquisite still.

So Julius Savaran cried upon his absent love to be true, and lifted arid eyes to the unresponsive heavens. It was strange that no doubt of her fidelity should ever have crossed him before that night. He had always pictured her as waiting—looking out into the future with yearning, wistful eyes ; growing thin, perhaps, but lovelier always, garlanded with the unfading roses of her love for him.

Oddly enough, at that moment Nelia's younger sister was saying in the high accents of retrospective youth :

" You know, if poor dear Julius hadn't bounced that half-million his uncle, the big banker, left him, everything would have been so different for Nelia. But they never met until he had been through the Bankruptcy Court and got whitewashed—whatever that may mean—and then they swore eternal fidelity, and he went away to the other end of nowhere to make his fortune. She was to wait until he had made it ; and she did—until she found she was growing quite plain, and then properly— Oh ! are they really going to try the electric searchlight ? What for ? Because they think these blots on the horizon mean an island ? Oh, I wonder whether it is, and whether anybody lives there ! Don't you ? "

Upon Savaran, standing rapt in his foolish dream of love and longing upon the deck of his little craft, a sudden pale radiance fell that was no starlight or lantern-shine. The western sky was irradiated by it ; the crests of the palms, the beach, the still lagoon, shone white while he could have counted ten. Then all was dark and quiet. It seemed as though the restless heart had had its answer, and he went below and slept. And with the morning came

a new surprise. With the flood-tide that poured through the passage that gave access to the outer ocean, borne like a gull upon the bosom of the vast mass of water that swept through those coral portals, came a stranger vessel, an English steam-yacht of considerable tonnage, flying the ensign of the Royal Yacht Club, and the pennant of St. George. A cloud of frightened birds flew up from the low bushes on the beach which her swift-passing shadow blackened. Ere long she rode securely through the channel into the quiet haven of the lagoon. Urged by a sudden impulse, Savaran threw himself into a tiny canoe-like craft, employed by him as a means of communication with the shore, and paddled out to meet her.

"Boat ahoy!" cried an English voice. There were heads of men, and women, too, looking over the rail.

"Boat ahoy!" someone cried from the rigging. "Is the anchorage good?"

"As good as need be," shouted Savaran. "Stand in to the northward a point or so, run her along opposite that shelly bluff — twenty-five fathoms there, and good bottom."

The yacht was manœuvred as he directed. He held aloof until her boatswain's whistle blew and her anchors plunged into the lagoon. When she was securely berthed, he drew near, and in response to an invitation climbed her side and stood upon her decks. The trim neatness of his surroundings, the yachtsmanlike smartness of the men who greeted him, oppressed him with the consciousness of his own unkempt condition. He knew himself clad in semi-rags, stained by wear and weather; he felt as haggard, travail-worn, sun-baked as he looked. Self-consciousness awakened in him, vigorous from its long sleep, and he was ashamed.

"You are English," said the owner of the yacht. He was a well-bred, middle-aged man, pale and spare, and

dark, with small extremities and high thin features, and carefully-trimmed, pointed beard.

"English," assented Savaran briefly, resenting the curiosity in his interlocutor's eyes.

"Voyaging among these islands for pleasure, I presume?"

"Not likely!" cried Savaran roughly. Then, noting the other's surprise, he added hastily: "I beg your pardon; but mine is simply a trading trip. You must have come across dozens of craft like mine. These seas swarm with pearl-luggers in the fishing season. I am my own sailing-master and my own diver, and whatever else you choose."

The owner of the yacht displayed his white teeth in a condescending smile.

"When you came in with the flood," Savaran went on, "I hoped it was the cutter from Thursday Island with stores. She's a week overdue, and we are short of rations."

"Anything with which it is in our power to supply you—"

"I will gladly buy what you can spare," said Savaran stiffly.

"An odd kind of character," thought the owner of the yacht, with a faint sarcastic twist of his thin lips. But he said aloud: "Perhaps you will do us the pleasure of joining us at breakfast?"

"If there are ladies," began Savaran, "I shall cut rather a Robinson-Crusoe-like figure in their eyes."

But the thin man who owned the yacht had disappeared under the cabin hatchway.

"He has gone to prepare his wife for a nervous shock," thought Savaran. He leaned against the rail, and his glance swept idly up and down the decks. "What is the name of your yacht?" he asked of a trimly clad deck-hand who passed him.

The man touched his cap in response to something in the tone of the unkempt stranger, and answered : "The *Duchess of Malfi*, sir."

Savaran had not been mistaken. He recognized the vessel he had built and named five years before. There was so little that was base or envious about the man that the pang was over in a moment. But he started violently a moment later, and the hot blood tingled to his very finger-tips, as a girl's voice said in a long-drawn quavering note of consternation : "Julius ! Mr. Savaran ! Oh, it is really you !"

"Ellice !"

He knew the face—a younger, rather trivial reproduction of Nelia's. He sprang to her and seized her hands with a broken cry of gladness.

"Little Ellice ! Of all strange chances that ever happened, this must be the strangest. To meet you in the lagoon of an uninhabited island in the middle of Torres Strait !"

His light eyes glowed strangely out of his brown face, his features quivered, he ground his scarred and roughened hands together against his breast. "Tell me," he almost whispered, "is anyone—anyone else whom I used to know—on board ?"

She shook her head and bit her lip. He paled under the bronzing and sighed heavily.

"Are you married, then ? Is the man who owns the yacht your husband ?"

"No," said Ellice. "A connection, Sir Charles Ansdell." She was pale and nervous. She had missed her opportunity of breaking the ice through her cowardice of a moment before, and regretted it desperately. "Julius," she said, clutching the frayed sleeve of the cotton jumper, "I want to explain—I ought to tell you——"

But he did not hear.

At that moment Sir Charles had issued from the cabin, gallantly carrying a lady's sunshade, and accompanied by its owner. She was a tall, slight young woman, dressed in some dainty fabric of pinkish white, with a rose-coloured ribbon about her dainty sailor hat, and a knotted scarf of the same colour about her pretty waist. She had grey eyes under well-marked eyebrows, and a quantity of golden-brown hair, and a complexion as creamy pink as the inside of a tropic shell. But she might have carried the mask of a Medusa. For Savaran, at the sight of her, stiffened into the similitude of an image of stone—an image of stone with a burning heart of fire.

"I am so sorry," whimpered Ellice at his side. His hand closed upon her arm like a steel vice. He leaned to the girl where they stood together on the quarter-deck.

"Tell the truth—if any woman can! Is she—this man's now? Not mine?"

"They were married—three months ago—in London Nelia wrote to your Sydney address to break it to you, but I suppose you didn't get the letter?"

"No, I did not get the letter."

Perhaps it had been forwarded to Thursday Island, and was even now coming in the cutter with the supplies.

She mustered courage to touch his arm.

"Promise—oh! promise you won't make a scene, or do anything awful."

"I promise," said Savaran, with an effort. "See, she is coming this way. Go and prepare her for the sight of me."

The girl flew at his bidding, and he waited, leaning against the rail until the dry, pompous voice of the owner of the yacht said, not without a ring of mockery:

"Nelia, my love, let me present this gentleman, Mr. —?"

"Savage!" said Savaran hoarsely.

"Mr. Savage, owner of the small vessel you see anchored yonder. It is, in fact, a pearl-lugger, and Mr. Savage is, he informs me, his own diver. An interesting but risky profession, I should say."

"Not more risky than other professions," said Savaran. "The man who is shaved every day by his valet imposes quite as much responsibility on Providence as the man who is content for the time being to obtain his necessary supply of respiratory air through an india-rubber tube." He looked at Lady Ansdell for the first time. "There may be a strain of madness in the barber—there may be a flaw in the tube."

She lowered her sunshade to hide her eyes, and wiped away with a filmy cambric handkerchief the tiny points of moisture that glistened on her white forehead and about her lips.

"I should like," she said, with a miserable attempt to be natural and interested, "to see you go down."

Savaran drew a quick, hard breath, and looked at her, and his light eyes gleamed.

"You shall see me go down," he said, and the promise was grimly given.

"When did it first occur to you to—ah—to try the experiment?" drawled Sir Charles.

"I went down for the first time three years ago," said Savaran, with grave civility; "and I shall go down for the last to-day."

"Made your fortune, and mean to retire?" hinted Sir Charles.

"I do not know that it would be called a fortune," said Savaran; "but I am going to retire."

He declined the pressing offer of breakfast, and paddled back to the lugger, upon the understanding that the yacht's boat would be pulled over to his anchorage by-and-by for the purpose of enabling the baronet and the

more curious of his party to witness the commencement of diving-operations for the day. All this while Savaran and the woman who had cast him off so lightly maintained the aspect of strangers ; and Ellice, as his tiny craft shot from the vessel's side, plumed herself upon the astuteness that had prevented the dreaded “ scene.”

“ You were so clever, dear.” Nelia sighed, with a grateful kiss. “ There is nothing too good for such a kind, sisterly little thing, not even the turquoise scarab with the brilliants that you have always liked so much.” And the trinket was handed over.

“ I must get Charles away,” reflected Lady Ansdell as she lingered before the mirror in her exquisitely decorated cabin, putting the finishing touches to a toilette which should enhance a thousand-fold the charms upon which Savaran’s heart had come to wreck. “ Poor dear ! he was so anxious to gratify my whim. I have always had a craze for outlandish places. And this queer ring of an island is quite romantic ; one might imagine two lovers leading a Paul and Virginia existence under the trees on these white beaches until they grew old—or got tired of each other.”

The smart white boat, with its striped awnings and gay cushions, shot over the translucent opal waters of the lagoon, scaring shoals of harlequin-coated fishes, darkening the coral flower-parterres deep down below, with its flying shadow. The half-caste from Port Kennedy and the Manilla men gaped at the English ladies. In the bows of the lugger stood a living pillar of steel, capped with flame.

“ They make the dress of aluminium now instead of india-rubber,” babbled the wordy little Baronet, eager to show off his knowledge of the subject before his bride. “ Lighter, and resists pressure better, though confoundedly expensive. Look ! he’s going down the ladder. No ; he’s beckoning. To you, I believe, my dear.”

Nelia rose from her seat in the galley's stern with a disagreeably beating heart and dry lips. The great copper helmet had turned to her ; the gauntleted hand signalled her to approach.

"Confounded impudence—what!" said the Baronet ; but Nelia did not hear. She had obeyed the mandate, trembling. Through the great glass goggles of the diver's helmet the sad eyes of her betrayed love looked into her own. The water reached already to his middle as he stood upon the ladder. A heavy knife was slung by a leathern strap about his neck. As he stood supporting himself with one hand upon the bulwarks of the lugger, he held the other hand out to her ; and in it was a little bag of chamois leather, attached to a fine steel chain.

She took it speechlessly. Then, without another sign, but keeping his eyes upon her always, he went slowly down into the depths. The pumps began to creak and pant ; the half-breed Australian held the life-lines. Looking down into the water, amidst eddies of violet and opal, cireles of greenish-white shot with inter-crossing streaks of liquid white fire, they saw the copper helmet receding and sinking and lessening ever, like a drowning sun. And then it vanished, and a silence fell.

A silence, broken after some minutes duration by a cry from the half-breed. The man's dusky, apeish features were convulsed with terror ; he leaped and jabbered, pointing to a flight of rising bubbles that chased each other upwards, and broke and vanished over the spot where the diver had disappeared. And the pumps began to choke and snort.

It was plain, even to the pompous little Baronet, that something was wrong. And the bubbles came up faster, and the infection of the half-breed's excitement caught the Manilla men. Something was horribly wrong, it was plain. Yet there had been no signal-twitch upon the life-

lines. At last the half-breed, knotting his long hair behind his ears, dived from the lugger's side. Seconds passed—seconds that seemed hours—and then the apeish face rose up from the troubled waters, and the eyes rolled with horror in their sockets, and the wide lips twisted back from the gleaming teeth as the man held up something in his dripping hand. It was the end of one of the india-rubber air-tubes that supplied the man in the helmet with the medium of life, and it had been severed with a sharp blade by a determined hand.

There was nothing more to be done. The yacht sailed away, and the pearl-lugger followed her before long, and the birds of Torres Strait have now sole possession of the atoll. But eighteen fathoms down, in the submarine Eden where the coral flowers bloom, stands Death, cuirassed and helmeted like any warrior of old ; keeping guard over those regions whence the hand of the living once tore the pearls that filled the little chamois bag—Savarán's Legacy.

## XV

## MRS. CRICHTON'S CONVERT

## I

EVERY regiment has its butt-man ; many boast of beauty-men ; others, again, are blatant in the possession of brainy men, who have knocked out and patented inventions—girthless saddles, self-detaching spurs, self-fixing horse-shoes, or Staff sandwich-boxes, “*which, when taken up by the War Office, sir, will bring in a mint of money !*” The Dapple Greys owned a Wicked Man until the Admirable Mrs. Crichton—— But of her anon.

The Wicked Man was of captains youngest, yet oldest in knowledge of the world and ripest in experience of evil. The Chief’s weather-beaten, aquiline nose became more hooked, it was thought, when the name of Thaddeus Probyn Macallister was mentioned in his hearing. The men of his squadron worshipped him with trembling. Even his bull-dog, a sweet-natured but diabolical-looking animal, came in for a share of the sinister popularity attaching to his master.

What did Taddy do ? To begin with, anything that it is possible for a gentleman to do, and still remain a gentleman. Everything that occurred to him as worth doing he did with thoroughness. For all the more lurid joys of life, including gambling, he had a pronounced *goût*, and at twenty-six had conscientiously earned the reputation of a reprobate.

When other men stood beneath the Tree of Knowledge crunching the windfalls and looking in the grass for more,

Taddy climbed up boldly and filled his pockets, and chaffed the chaplain when he told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. He had small faith in man, and in woman none at all, and usually made this plain to her long before she had discovered, as she invariably did, that he was not to be implicitly relied on.

It is a common thing with fictionists, when delineating a character who, like Taddy, travels through life armed with the conviction that all women are unvirtuous—I refrain from quoting the poet's line, which every reader will supply—it is a common thing for the story-writer to leave in such an amatory cynic one soft spot, one unmildewed grain of belief in the truth, goodness, and purity of one particular piece of femininity. Sometimes the instance is a little cousin or sister who died of consumption at an early age; sometimes the memory of his mother sweetens some corner in a corrupted heart. Taddy's sisters and cousins were all alive, grown up, fashionable women of the world—its mud-stains were on the petticoats of every one of them; while as for his mother—

You who read are either a very young or a very unfashionable person if you fail to be aware that the celebrated leader of one of the fastest society sets in Paris, Madame la Comtesse de Fallecourt, was, eighteen years ago, as the Honourable Mrs. Macallister, heroine of one of the most comprehensive divorce cases that ever raised the circulation of a daily paper by some millions in the week. Taddy's hatred of the mother who bore him was part of his rather meagre heritage; an heirloom handed down from father to son. It was grim and great in its intensity. I think that to have suggested to Taddy that his capacity for Don Giovannism—if I may coin a word—was drawn from the turbulently-flowing maternal source, instead of from the cooler and more placid paternal stream, would have in-

volved grave consequences to the suggester, and gone a long way towards transforming Taddy into what his Scotch servant—a Free Kirk man and a rigid moralist—would have called “a reputable liver and a vessel o’ grace.” But Heredity was not, at the period I write of, the rallying shout of theorists, and the idea did not occur to any man—or, if it did, he possessed his soul in silence for reasons mentioned above.

And so the young scapegrace went on his headlong way, gravely remonstrated with at times by his Caledonian Leporello, gathering roses wherever he might or might not, and making heartless game of the lyrical reproaches of Donna Anna and the other ladies in black ; who, you will observe, couch their most crying, or rather shrieking, grievance not in the fact of having been deluded, but in the fact of having been deserted. But—and the more properly-brought-up among my readers will be glad to hear it—the Nemesis who was to avenge all these wrongs wreaked upon the sex, who was to deal out prose retribution as well as poetic justice until the measure of the offender was full to overflowing, was by-and-by to come along—in the person of a woman still unknown !

Taddy was a sincere and consistent unbeliever, if I have not mentioned it before. He was well read, though in a desultory kind of way ; and had a characteristic method of assailing venerable beliefs with astronomical, geological, and zoological facts of indisputable veracity. Young Cornets, whose maternal relatives had made them promise to hang coloured texts over their camp-bedsteads and read good little bits out of good little books every night before retiring to rest, filled up the Oxford frames with racehorses or sirens of the ballet, gave the texts to their terriers to worry, and threw the little books into the waste-paper basket, after they had hearkened awhile to Captain Thaddeus Macallister. Perhaps some

others stuck manfully to their religious guns, in defiance of Taddy and his imposing array of modern scientific artillery ; and these, as likely as not, he would vote good fellows. He was remarkable for never making a friend of a man who did not contradict him, perhaps because he was a man of contradictions himself. But few men could afford friendship with Taddy for long. It was extremely pleasant, but costly in the article of reputation as well as in the loss of money, for Taddy was an inveterate gambler, and invariably won. That was not his fault, of course, and he was generous enough to have given back his money to a man who could not afford to lose it ; that is, supposing the man would have taken it, and provided he did not happen to want it himself ; though he always did want it too badly to test the resisting powers of that unlucky man. The profession of Lovelace is, you will understand, an expensive one, unless upon the stage, when the management pays for clothes, and the jewels and other fine toys presented to Clarissa, like the compliments with which the would-be seducer dazzles her, return to roost as regularly as the curtain falls, and may be used over and over again.

But I fear the Admirable Mrs. Crichton has been kept waiting an unconscionable time.

## II

She came on the scene at a moment when the Dapple Greys seemed on the point of losing their Wicked Man. Taddy, dormant for a brief period, had broken out, had flourished his heels, metaphorically speaking, in the face of Virtue and Propriety—Virtue and Propriety upon this occasion being represented by the Senior Major's wife. So the Senior Major, as a dutiful husband was bound to do, made representations and demanded explanations, and the toesin sounded and the fiery cross went from hand to hand ; and the regimental ladies rose as one woman—hardly

a plain one, by-the-by!—and the Chief closeted himself with the Adjutant for a solemn pow-wow.

"It's not that I'm particularly in sympathy with the feminine Rufford, you know, don't you know," said Sir Alured, uneasily spinning on his office-chair and tugging at his great iron-grey moustache. "And to take official cognizance of a prudish woman's report is dee'd unpleasant and offensive to me. But, as it happens, a breach of regimental ethics is involved in the case, and I'm bound to take some steps. Rufford demands it, egged on by that —by his wife, who considers herself grossly insulted. It seems she and Macallister encountered in Paris, three days ago. She's been visiting an aunt, elderly and invalid, who lives near Versailles—so Rufford tells me—and Macallister —the deuce may care what took him there!—the usual business, I suppose. Anyhow, they met!"

Sir Alured paused, and twisted the great moustache again savagely while the Adjutant listened with respectful attention, and the sergeant-clerk, in the outer office, grew purple in the effort to respire soundlessly, as he hung with all his ears upon the utterances of the Chief as they filtered through the keyhole of the Private Department.

"They met," the Colonel went on—"where, Mrs. Rufford doesn't exactly specify, and I don't know that it's necessary to localize. We'll say at a restaurong, or on the Boolvar. Macallister had a woman with him, it appears—an unmistakably meretricious kind of person, y'know, don't you know?—and he came up, it seems, in that cool way he's got—dee the fellow!—and introduced his companion—to his Senior Major's wife."

Sir Alured reached a colossal Partaga from a box on the chimney-piece, and bit off the end savagely. "What can you say for a man who does that sort of thing?" he demanded.

The Adjutant drew a sibilant breath between his teeth.

Answer he had none. The thing was bad, very bad ; ungentlemanly, blackguardly. He could not have believed, sceptical as he knew Taddy to be on the subject of women, that he would have been capable of such a thing. It meant a serious scandal. Grave official rebuke ; a sentence of ostracism pronounced by the regimental voice. It signified, as the mildest consequence involved, exchange. The Adjutant's freckled face grew long and dismal, and under its scrubby penthouse of ginger hair his lip twitched nervously.

"To return to Macallister," the Chief resumed, the Partaga being lighted and in full blast. "The men of his squadron like him, you've told me ?"

"Follow him to hell, sir, I believe !" said the Adjutant, who had pleaded Taddy's cause staunchly from the beginning.

"He'll get there without their help," growled the Chief. Then he said : "Don't like losing good officer, if he is a bad character, you know, don't you know ? Needn't talk of leaving the regiment. Ask him if he wouldn't like to go out to Port Christmas for a year or so ? Kirby cables me Parke must exchange. All boils, you know, don't you know ?"

The Adjutant quitted Sir Alured, and looked in on Taddy the same evening, meaning to drop that hint about South Africa and the state of Parke's blood. Taddy, all unconscious of the tempest brewing, was lying full length on his sofa, with his head where his feet ought properly to have been, smoking very hard, and beating the devil's tattoo with a pair of very prettily-worked slippers on the back of it. He performed the rites of hospitality without moving from his position, threw his cigarette-case at the Adjutant's head, and, indicating with a flourish of one slipper the cupboard whence drink perennially flowed for the sustainment of himself and his visitors :

"Draw up that table," he commanded. "The cards are in the thingumbob underneath. Now, what shall it be, my merry, merry man—*écarté*, *casino*, *poker*, *dummy whist*? Whist for choice, unless you'd prefer——"

"I won't play to-night, thanks," the Adjutant said soberly. "I'm not up to the mark. Something's——"

"You should be more careful," Taddy advised, with parental solicitude. "Between ourselves, you lead an awful life : to bed with the busy bee and up with the lark. The Early Bird is the most demoralizing companion a man can have. I've often told you so. Besides——"

"You're in good spirits to-night," the Adjutant said wearily.

"I am in excellent fettle," Taddy owned. "I've had a little change of air, for one thing. Paris—even in the Dog-days—always agrees with me."

The Adjutant threw out a clumsy feeler.

"What took you to Paris—in the Dog-days ?"

"Rather a remarkable combination of motives," Taddy replied, with an odd gleam in his queer topaz-coloured eyes and a sardonic curl of his well-cut lips. "But the leading incentive was a philanthropic desire to further the progress of morality. A great many people call me an immoral man. Now, if I were to tell them that I went to Paris to teach a lesson in the domestic virtues, I dare say they wouldn't believe me! But what I say is true—upon my word! The whole thing makes quite a neat little story. I'll tell it you—in confidence, and suppressing names, and so forth—if you like."

The Adjutant opened his eyes and ears. Knowing, as he did, that so many other vices were fully developed in Taddy's organization that the vice of untruthfulness had been crowded out, he waited with eagerness the coming relation.

"A great many hundred miles from the patch of carpet

where this sofa stands," said Taddy, "there lives a woman, married—we'll say to a wealthy civilian, whose proper title we'll submerge in that of the Member for Drillshire. The Member for Drillshire is a fussy, good kind of idiot, and more married to his wife than any other man I can call to mind. She," said Taddy, slowly, "is a personage who, in the memory of every one of her acquaintance, has always occupied a pedestal. She is cited as an admirable wife and a devoted mother. She takes the lead in charitable and religious movements. The woman who is talked about, justly or unjustly, ceases to be her friend ; the name of the man who breathes a *double entendre* within earshot of this Cornelia, Lucretia, and Penelope rolled into one, is blotted from her visiting-list. I've often looked at her—she's attractive in a heavily-moulded, sleepy-eyed kind of style—noting the odd discrepaney between her mental and physical constitutions, and wondering whether, deep down in the nature of such a woman, buried under all that cold, heavy, supereilious flesh, something dangerous, passionate, explosive, might not lie dormant, waiting only the nerve-jar, the electric spark that should——"

"Send everything pop!" suggested the Adjutant.

"Pop's the word. Well, I wondered until I grew tired, and left off, and she went on henpecking her husband—the Member for Drillshire, you know—and nursing her children, and ordering her servants about, and laying down the law to her friends on questions of propriety, and generally proving herself a very well-ordered and admirably-principled specimen of British matronhood. Did I mention that one of her chief claims to good taste and exclusiveness lay in her dislike of your humble servant?"

"No," the Adjutant said, conscientiously ; "but I can imagine——"

"That such a woman would naturally shrink from such a personification of impropriety as myself?" The Wicked

Man of the regiment laughed, and his laugh was not altogether pleasant to hear. "Granted that, we'll skip to the Third Volume. One night, just a week ago, a letter was delivered at my quarters here in rather a mysterious way. There were a lot of others waiting to be read." Taddy jerked his head in the direction of the chimney-glass, which boasted its usual complement of monogrammed envelopes. "Something in the handwriting struck me, and I opened it first of all. It was from the wife of the Member for Drillshire."

Taddy paused.

" Asking you to tea ?"

" Asking me to meet her at an hotel in Paris three days from date."

" You're joking ?"

" I'm serious. Oh ! I wasn't wrong in that guess about the dynamite. A declaration couched in unmistakable terms from a woman with whom I had hardly ever exchanged more than six words at a time. A woman who had always kept me at arm's-length ; not that I'd ever entertaincd the wish to come nearer. . . . Those heavy women aren't my style," Taddy explained, candidly, " and I'd never given Cornelia-Lucretia-Penelope a second thought. Well, what have you to say ?"

" I say," pronounced the Adjutant, " that the whole thing's pretty stiff. What did you do ?"

" What I did," returned the Wicked Man, slowly, " wasn't delicate or refined, but it was effective—thoroughly effective. She said—in the letter—she'd lost her head, and proved that she hadn't quite by asking me to burn the precious missive when I'd read it. Well, I made up my mind I'd bring her to her senses. I sent back a line saying I'd meet her—she'd laid down all her lines"—he drooped his dark eyelids and sneered—" in the letter she sent me, which, by the way, I didn't burn—quite like an old cam-

paigner. I suppose French novels help Englishwomen out in emergencies of the amatory kind. . . . And I crossed to Calais, and caught the Paris train some twenty-four hours earlier than the appointed time, and looked up Madame Félice—I wanted her help in the lesson I was going to teach, you see. . . .”

“Who is Madame Félice ?” asked the Adjutant, with some gruffness. He got up and went to the hearth, and kicked a smouldering billet into sparks with unnecessary ferocity. “Who is Madame Félice ?” he asked again.

“She is, or was, aunt to a little woman I used to know—a chorus-girl at the Bouffes Variétés. I gave no explanations, and she asked none. All she wanted was money—and she got that. Well, when the appointed time came I drove to the hotel, asked for her—the Wife of the Member for Drillshire—by the name she’d given me. The waiter threw open the double doors ; the Wife of the Member for Drillshire rose to meet me, with some display of agitation. Then she caught the flare of Madame’s carotty wig and pink feathers—she has a meteoric taste in bonnets—behind me. . . .”

“Well ?” The Adjutant’s voice was stern.

“She drew herself up, and dealt me one look, double-edged, and poisoned at that. ‘What do you——? How dare you——? Why is this woman——?’ All three interrogations, one after the other, bitten off short between teeth that I verily believe would quite as readily have bitten *me*. Then I made my explanation. ‘You will pardon me,’ I said in English, because I did not want old Félice to understand me, ‘but as you omitted to mention in your letter that the interview for which you asked was to take place in the presence of a third person, I have taken the liberty of bringing this lady as my chaperon, not being a married man !’ ”

“What followed ?”

"Oh!—asterisks. I'd pitched it a little strong, I don't deny; but it was the first time in my life I'd taken the level of high morality, you see."

The Adjutant said, in a tone that rang like bell-metal:

"And immediately after disporting yourself on the—how do you put it?—the level of high morality, you met and insulted Mrs. Rufford?"

Taddy leapt to his feet in an instant.

"Mrs. Rufford? Confound you, man! I named no names."

Upon this a silence fell upon the room so profound that the ticking of the clock and the falling of the cinders upon the hearth sounded unnecessarily aggressive. It was broken by the Adjutant moving to the door. With his hand upon the lock, he turned and spoke. With the shock of the revelation of a moment before, his ugly face was white under the freckles; and a fire of anger and contempt burned under the scanty covert of his reddish-white eyelashes, of which it was not good to be the object.

"The unhappy creature of whose mad infatuation and pitiable weakness you—who never yielded to an infatuation or owned a weakness!—have taken such cowardly advantage has, it is as well you should know, represented to her husband, Major Rufford—the Member for Drillshire"—the accent on the words stung like a cut from a horsewhip—"that you met her in Paris, accidentally, and, being in company with some person of the type of the niece of Madame Félice, insulted her by presenting the woman to her notice. This lie she has probably concocted, partly out of the necessity of accounting to her husband for her agitation, partly impelled by the desire for revenge. I have no doubt she is under the impression that you have burned her letter. Favour me by destroying it now, in my presence, before I leave your room!"

Under the influence of a righteous indignation the most insignificant of men may swell to proportions almost

formidable. Taddy, who could have broken the little Adjutant like a dried stick between his hands, felt him to be at this psychological moment the stronger man of the two. Besides, in his peculiar way, he liked and respected the Adjutant. If he could have retained his good opinion without any personal trouble or self-sacrifice, he would have preferred to do so. Without speaking, then, he wrenched down the sliding shutter-top of his secretaire, took a letter from a drawer that opened with a spring, and, holding it out at arm's length so that the Adjutant might verify the signature, crumpled it into a ball and tossed it into the glowing fire. When it was consumed and done with, he said :

"I did that for your sake, you know ; not for hers. Though, on my honour, Collins, I never meant to use it. Let her invent and stick to whatever story she devises ; I'll stand the racket. And now——"

He held out his hand, but the Adjutant made no responsive movement.

"I can't take it, Macallister," he said.

"Why should we quarrel about a worthless woman ?" said Taddy, with a shrug.

"By the living Tinker ! I don't know," the Adjutant broke forth. "I've always liked you ; I've always hated Rufford's wife ; and yet—to trample, as you did, on that poor devil, instead of putting her pitiful confession in the fire and forgetting all about it—— No, sir, the thing's too raw. And—I came to your quarters to-night as a friend, but it's best you should know that I've crossed your threshold for the last time—in that capacity."

"As you please," said Taddy, rigid now. "Have you anything more to say before you go ?"

"Only this," said the little Adjutant ; "I hope—I hope to Heaven !—though you don't believe in there being any Commander-in-Chief at Headquarters Above—that some

day, not very long to wait for, a woman will make you pay, chalk by chalk, the score that her whole sex have got down against you ! I hope——”

“ You’re letting an infernal draught in,” said Taddy.

The Adjutant banged the door behind him, and went clinking and jingling down the passage. He was exhausted with his late upbraidings, and stood a moment on the doorstep, breathing hard, and looking blindly out into the barrack-square. It was a gusty, moonless night, and the flickering yellow gas-lamps were almost swallowed up in surging billows of wind-tossed shadow. In the lee of the block of buildings the blackness was almost solid.

The Adjutant bit firmly on the chin-strap of his regulation cap, and strode forth to do battle with the elements. The wild wind charged down upon him, and blew a woman into his arms. He was entangled in her draperies—gagged by a long lace scarf, which wound itself about his head and face like something in the seaweed-line. But he felt her clutch his arm, and heard her—in spite of his envelopment—gasp out :

“ Captain Macallister ! I must speak to you.”

“ I beg your pardon,” the Adjutant said in muffled tones, unwinding himself as best he could, while the storm shrieked round the pair of them, and the whips of the rain lashed and stung. But the wild woman clung to him and went on. A sudden surge of fear had risen and swamped her triumph in the reprisal that she had set brewing. It had occurred to her that the man in whose hands she had placed the threads of her destiny, and the scissors wherewith to cut them if he liked, might not have burned the letter, after all. And her terror had been to her as a scourge, lashing her forth into the darkness.

“ Don’t betray me !” she cried. “ I was mad. It was you who made me so. Have some mercy on a woman who——”

Then, as some vagrant ray of light, wrenched from one of the distracted gas-lamps by a fresh gust, fell upon the Adjutant's face, she shrieked out wildly, and would have fled; but the little man caught the frantic creature by the arm.

"Mrs. Rufford! Mrs. Rufford!" he shouted above the howling of the wind; "you're safe. Do you understand? I saw your letter burned—I swear it!"

"Oh!" she cried, as if he had stabbed her. "You know—you know! Does all the world know? Oh, my children! I'll kill myself! I'll——"

She strove with him, shrieking as if she had been the very incarnation of the warring elements; while the Adjutant kept repeating over and over that nobody knew, besides Macallister, save himself, and she might rely upon their secrecy. Presently the seven devils went out of her, leaving her more feeble than her own youngest-born, and she was able to listen, and moan out a grateful word or two, and finally crawl homewards, clinging to the good little Adjutant's arm. Before they parted he had heard her promise to forget, to go and sleep—rise upon the morrow with no change in her; and, above all, to stick to her invented story like a true daughter of Eve.

But on the morrow Mrs. Rufford did not rise; she had taken measures—out of the Major's medicine-chest—calculated to keep her tempestuous heart and her unruly senses quiet until the Judgment Day. And, with that most painful candour which comes of knowing that comments upon your conduct will never reach your living ears, she had left a letter exonerating Captain Thaddeus Macallister from the charge she had brought against him. And the whole thing was hushed up; but Captain Thaddeus Macallister, nevertheless, exchanged command of squadron with Parke—Parke of the boils—and went out in charge of a seasick foreign service draft of Dapple Greys to Port Christmas.

## III

About the same time the Admirable Mrs. Crichton's medical advisers recommended South Africa for her health, which was understood to be fragile. Crichton, too, having exhausted other sources of amusement, united with two or three other men of his type—large, loud, florid, slangy, well-groomed, and well-to-do—to organize a rhinoceros-shooting expedition into Bechuanaland. Thither, then, they betook themselves, per medium of Sir Donald Currie.

"You'll take care of yourself, dear, I know," said the Admirable Mrs. Crichton, brushing with a pretty, conjugal air some specks of reddish dust from the collar of Crichton's velveteen shooting-coat. "I know you'll take care of yourself, and so I shall not be anxious. Fretting is so bad for people with delicate lungs!"

And she went to the station to see him off for Kimberley, whence he and his party were to take waggon for the shores of Lake Ngami. At the last moment Crichton had a spasm of devotion.

"You're sure you won't be lonely? Wouldn't like me to stop behind and take care of you, little woman?" he said, with a sentimental expression on his large pink face which caused the other men to grin covertly.

"Oh no!" Mrs. Crichton said rather hurriedly. Then a little quiver came about her delicate lips, and she lifted her eyes, the brilliancy of which was increased by the bluish shadows about them. "I shall be quite safe," she said; "and you, dear, will be guarded from anything untoward. . . ." And she lifted those deep violet orbs to the dome of her pink sunshade with such unaffected grace and simple piety that not one of the three men who made up Crichton's party failed to experience a slight dimness of the vision and huskiness in the throat. Crichton alone remained unmoved, perhaps from innate stolidity, perhaps

from that familiarity which renders the stage-carpenter impervious to the most thrilling dramatic effects, and which comes of being behind the scenes.

"By George ! your wife's a pearl, Crikey !" said one of the men, as the locomotive rattled on its way.

"She's awf'ly religious, and all like that," said the husband rather glumly, "in spite of her being a regular woman of the world. And she wants some tusks, and skulls, and skins, and things for the hall at home," he added, letting the drop of bitterness that brimmed his cup run over.

Meanwhile the Admirable Mrs. Crichton was making herself as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Circumstances are singularly malleable and elastic in the case of people who have plenty of ready money.

It was early in the season. In spite of those delicate lungs, the tropical climate of the coast agreed with her, and until it became necessary to move to the higher districts, or until Crichton should return, or until the whim should seize her to return to England, the Admirable Mrs. Crichton decided to remain at Port Christmas. The hospitality of Government House was hers to command ; the Legislative Council and the Military force vied with each other in homage to the recently imported fair. The scenery was new to her. The mixed population—European, Dutch, Asiatic, and Zulu-Kaffir—pleased her with a sense of harmonious incongruity, like an artistic piece of patchwork. So she pitched her tent in the blue shadow of the Drakensberg Mountains.

Personal descriptions are ticklish things. The Admirable Mrs. Crichton was among the number of women who invite description while they defy it. She was above middle height ; her perfectly rounded shape, her hands and feet, beyond commendation. She had an exquisite blush-rose-tinted skin, with bluish shadows—the kind of skin that goes with some shades of red hair. Her hair,

however, was not red, but of pale silvery gold, a hue so well chosen, and matching so discreetly with her deep violet eyes, that nobody could blame the fashion. She wore it in tangled masses above her straight fine eyebrows, which, like her lashes, were of tawny-brown. Her profile was fine, too, sensitive and delicate. The nose tilted a little to one side, a peculiarity of which its owner was conscious, and concealed by tilting her charming head at the same angle. Her mouth and chin, inimitably modelled, were perhaps the prettiest features she owned. She possessed a powerful intellect in combination with an hysterical temperament—the temperament which is called “artistic,” and goes to make the poet, the musician, or the mime. Any one of these things she might have been—notably the last ; she was an aggregation of all the talents. Also she rode well, drove, fenced, and swam ; angled, shot, and played tennis creditably ; hence her society nickname of the Admirable Mrs. Crichton.

Such a woman, it will be easily conceded, might be all things to all men—would be one thing to all women, unless for some abstruse or apparent reason she found it necessary to cultivate their friendship.

But this necessity seldom occurred. There are few crises in life in which a man cannot be useful, and the Admirable Mrs. Crichton had only to lift her little finger to command the services of a dozen *cavalieri-serventi* at need. Wherever she went a guard of honour sprang up about her—picked men, young and straight, well-looking, and generally well-to-do, though she preferred beauty to a banking account, it must be owned. A strain of sensuousness, perhaps, was latent in her nature, co-existent with a strong religious tendency, for she came of one of the oldest Catholic families. . . . And among all the passions of the woman's complex nature, the cold passion of proselytism reigned supreme. Throughout the tangled web of

follies, desires, hankerings, predilections that made up her life one motive ran. To be of the world, worldly, and yet among saints, saintly, was the cherished ambition of her heart.

## IV

The Governor's wife found Mrs. Crichton charming. I have said that when it was necessary to enlist the suffrages of her own sex she could do so at will. The Governor was admittedly *épris*. He and the other men who rallied round her standard wondered solemnly how Crichton could find it in his heart to leave so lovely a woman—"and with delicate lungs, too, begad!"—unprotected; while they were frankly obliged to him for having done so.

Balls, dinners, polo-parties, picnics, improvised sports and races, were organized in honour of the Admirable Mrs. Crichton. She had brought out a good many of her diamonds and a quantity of astonishing gowns—daring combinations of colour, in which any other woman would have felt conscious and looked conspicuous. One especial hat, pink straw, turned up behind cockle-fashion, and trimmed with a whole rose-bush, bearing blue blossoms of colossal size, drove every she in the Colony to the verge of desperation; nor was its wearer too perfect in meekness to rejoice at the effect created. Wherever she went she was the centre of a vortex, in the seething waters of which wailing maidens and indignant matrons were doomed to see the bodies of sweethearts and husbands disappear, to bob up again serenely at some future time, little the worse in outward aspect for the experience; or to be cast up, swollen and battered and unrecognizable, at the feet of some wan-eyed watcher on the shore.

"Who," said the Admirable Mrs. Crichton to the Governor's wife on the occasion of a grand polo-match

on the Victoria Ground—"who is the man who plays so splendidly? The man on the sorrel pony with black points?"

The Governor's wife looked in the direction indicated by a scarcely perceptible lift of Mrs. Crichton's pretty chin, and instantly became rigid, like a venerable and experienced pointer who scents game.

"That," she said, "is Captain Macallister."

"He is like an Etruscan bronze—rather," said Mrs. Crichton.

Taddy's club had shivered into splinters a moment previously, and he had cantered up to the barricade to take a fresh weapon from the hands of the groom who held his spare pony. He was looking his best—irreproachable in white cords and tan leggings—and he may or may not have overheard the comment. At any rate, before he dashed away again into the thickest of the *mélée* he turned in his saddle and sent a look, almost insolent in its undisguised admiration, in the direction of the lady whom the Colony united to honour.

Mrs. Crichton looked away—her profile, we are aware, was without fault. A moment later she murmured languidly :

"Tell me something about this Captain—what name did you——? Ah! Macallister."

"He belongs," said the Governor's wife, with a suppressed snort, "to a good Scotch family; and he is, I have reason to believe, a disgrace to it!"

"My dear lady!" murmured Mrs. Crichton, lifting her delicate eyebrows under the shadow of the blue roses; "what has he done?"

"Everything, the Governor gives me to understand."

"Everything! Vague, but comprehensive," commented the Admirable Mrs. Crichton.

The Governor's wife leaned to her guest's ear, and gave a brief but vitriolic résumé of Taddy's offences.

Mrs. Crichton listened, her violet eyes roving over the polo-ground in quest of the sorrel pony. The man who rode it—the man whose profile reminded her of an Etruscan bronze—was undoubtedly a bad subject, undeniably an interesting one.

The Dapple Greys gave a ball that night. Captain Thaddeus Macallister was presented to the Admirable Mrs. Crichton. She danced well, as she did all other things ; and Taddy had learned to valse in Germany. They swam, they skated, they flew. The pale, pure profile with the sensitive curves and the Etruscan bronze features came very close together.

"He's made up his mind it's going to be plain sailing, confound him !" said one of his brethren of the sabretasche.

"He'll be mistaken for once in his life !" said a member of the Legislative Council.

But at this there was an outburst of incredulity.

From thenceforward Mrs. Crichton possessed a shadow—a shadow with a bronze Etrusean profile. Society in the Colony stood with its finger on its lip waiting for the ripening of a scandal. But the scandal never came to maturity. Taddy the Irresistible found himself resisted ; had to own his unsucces ; had to submit to being kept at arm's length by a woman who frankly owned that she was not indifferent to him. And, finally, being meshed in the net of his own outrageous vanity, convinced that the virtue that could confess so much and deny so much must be superhuman—nay, divine—he fell prostrate in homage before the Good Woman, whose existence he had profoundly disbelieved in until that moment. The flood-gates of the man's heart were broken down by the potent touch of Love, and a torrent of devotion, faith, reverence, trust—all that in which his nature had seemed most lacking—poured forth at the feet of the Admirable Mrs. Crichton. Passion, as he had known it, had nothing in

common with this glow and thrill and tremor of unutterable rapture that the sound of her voice, the echo of her footsteps, a glimpse of her distant figure, awoke in him. The glove that she had worn, the cushion that her head had rested on, were sacred to him—to him who had made a jest of all sacred things. Her name spoken by other men made him shudder. He knew himself of all men most unworthy to take it upon his lips ; and yet it was so unutterably dear ! Heaven have mercy on the man or woman who shall love another human creature with such utter, unquestioning, absolute devotion, I say ! for a day shall come when the beloved will have none.

She occupied a villa, the property of a colonial absentee, amidst orange-groves and orchards, a few miles from the town. An elderly relative of the owner was let with the house as housekeeper or companion, or as both together, to the Admirable Mrs. Crichton. And she and Taddy rode and drove, walked and talked together, or meditated without speaking in the brief border of twilight that in South Africa divides day from dusk. She let him hold her hand. Once he even dared to kiss her cheek. She spoke to him upon the subject of his soul ; and one night she asked him for it, and got it for the asking. She gave him in exchange a good little book, which he solemnly vowed to read, and a letter to her director, to be personally delivered.

One may conjecture that Taddy's sensations were not enviable as he rode out next morning to the Church of the Holy Contemplation, and pulled at the sacristy-bell with his bridle on his arm. The middle-aged, kindly-faced priest to whom the letter was addressed was a man of experience, grown grey in the knowledge of the world. But he had never had a stranger catechumen than this young military dandy in grey tweeds and Bedford cords, who flogged his spurred boot with his hunting-crop, and swore under his breath when he mixed up the Seven Necessary

Virtues with the Mortal Sins. He shook his wise old head, but he did not show him the door ; the Church may not close her portals in the face of one who seeks admission. And when, a certain amount of intimacy having been established between himself and his visitor, he asked plump and plain for Taddy's reasons, Taddy gave them bluntly enough.

"It's this way," he said, looking straight at the Father from under the bar of his black brows, and digging one hand deep into his breeches-pocket. "I've been a racketey cus—character all my life up to now. I've held every man cheap, except myself, and every woman cheaper, without any exception at all. And, though a good many women have cared for me, poor dev—poor things !—I swear I've never met a woman, out of a church-picture, who had the look in her eyes that makes a man feel humble and ashamed, and as if he ought to go down upon his knees and tell her all the worst he knows of himself—but for fear of making her hate him—until now ! She wrote that letter —you've got it in your hand—and she's——"

The priest said, with a subtle intonation : "She is a married woman!"

"I know that," Taddy said, with a dark flush, gripping his riding-crop in both hands and bending it across his knee. "But you haven't got the hang of things if you think—if you suppose!— She's an angel to me—not an earthly woman. I'm low down, wading among the rotten water in the bogs, and she's high up, standing on the mountain-top, with the wild yellow violets about her feet, and the clouds for her veil. And I want to be made fit to worship her. I want to earn the right to take her hand and look her in the eyes. I want to believe what she believes, and go where she goes—when I die. And if your Church—her Church—will take me"—he snapped the Malacca cane of the crop in two and tossed the pieces from

him, and stood up, his nostrils quivering, his broad chest heaving, his hands clenched, and a swollen V-shaped vein starting between his sombre brows—"make me what *she* would have me be, here I am!"

The good Father had certainly never had a more unique penitent. But he was a pure-hearted and gentle-natured man. And, he argued, this trembling birth of reverence for Womanhood in its late contemner, this birth of the Ideal, crowned with the daystar and throned upon the mountains in a brain and heart barren until now of noble thought or high aspiration, had in it something of the miraculous.

## V

The Dapple Greys recovered from the shock received when Taddy first marshalled the Catholic contingent of that gallant regiment to Mass, sooner than might have been expected. People get used to things so quickly.

People tire of things so quickly, too. If the truth must be told, the Admirable Mrs. Crichton did not find Taddy regenerate, Taddy clothed and in his right mind, half so interesting or such good company as Taddy the Wicked Man. And she had met Lord Donald Courtroyd, and Lord Donald took up a great deal of her time, though of this Taddy was not aware. An *Excuser's Handbook; or, Easy Instructor in the Indispensable Art of Putting Off*, might have been compiled from the letters which Taddy received at this period, and sheaved and cherished.

Everybody knows Lord Donald Courtroyd, the big, bearded, exuberant man who was once a Queen's Courier, and has butchered more big game—on paper—than anybody since Osswell died. He is younger brother to a duke, and his books are full of bouncing fibs, inaccurate scientific information, and bad grammar. His entertainment, "Horns, Hides, and Hoofs: by the Man who Won Them,"

drew all fashionable London last season for one afternoon. He has seen much of African savage life, and, it is whispered, taken kindly to its customs. Here was indeed a brand to be plucked from the burning. In her eagerness to perform this work of charity, the Admirable Mrs. Crichton leaned a little too closely over the furnace, and got those seraphic wings of hers rather badly scorched. No power, human or divine, might have convinced Taddy that such a casualty was possible, had he not seen, and heard, and smelt singed feathers for himself.

He had been debarred the rapture of the sight and sound of her for four whole days. She had "a touch of fever," and wished to be alone. If the fever had fallen to *his* share, he would have been honestly thankful. He had once gone with her to visit an English servant of hers who had broken his leg. He remembered how she had gone into the stuffy sick-room, rustling like a pleasant breeze, and taken her gloves off with a business-like air—and put them on again and rustled out. Perhaps she would have come to him if he had been ill. He was dear to her—she had confessed as much. If she were not already married—oh, gall and honey mingled!—she would have given herself to him. He knew himself unworthy to mate with such an angel, but there were others even less worthy—men like Lord Donald Courtroyd, for example, of whose life and habits he thoroughly disapproved. He was beyond all sense of humour; and if anybody had pointed out that the notion of his—of Taddy's—disapproving of any man's morals was funny in the extreme, he would have failed to see it.

The first of the four days of exile was drawing to its close. The inland mail-bag came in as Taddy lounged, cigar in mouth, into the Mess smoking-room, threw himself into a big cane chair, and called for a lemon squash; he had knocked off pegs, and only drank whisky at meals,

"for the stomach's sake," and then sparingly. There was a letter for him with the Kimberley postmark ; a man he knew, who held some minor official position at the Diamond Mines, had written to him out of pure idleness. But one paragraph upon the scrawled sheet made his heart stop beating for an instant, and then commence a frantic tattoo against his ribs.

*"Four English swells, men who went up-country to shoot rhino in the Ngami Valley four months ago—perhaps you knew them?—got back yesterday. That is, three of them, and what is left of the fourth sewn up in tilt-canvas. His name was Crichton, and a keiloa ripped him up, they say, and they're bringing the body home to his missus, who is waiting for him at Port Christmas. They're all dismally drunk at the moment of writing, and dealing for the ace of spades with the object of settling which of them is to break the news to the widow. I hear she's stunning——"*

Taddy got up out of his chair all in one piece, like a man moved by clockwork, and made two strides to the door. An orderly was waiting on the stoep, and he said to the man :

"Tell Haygarth to put Lorna Doone in the bamboo-cart at once;" and when the mare came round, kicking, and trying to smash the trap against every obstacle she encountered, from a sentry to a gatepost, he sprang up and took the reins, and man and brute and cart were gone in a cloud of reddish dust.

"Something up!" said somebody. "Drove off without an overcoat! No joke to be underclad in one of these soaking tropical dews! He'll be as mad as a bumble to-morrow with what my sergeant calls 'pennymonia.'"

"Couldn't be madder than he is now!" somebody else rejoined, and the subject dropped. Meanwhile Lorna Doone had done with the level, and was galloping wildly up the long bad gully-road that led to the plateau where the villa

stood, bumping the bamboo cart into muddy holes and over lumps of sandstone, while trailing vines and thorny creepers lashed her driver in the face. With a final struggle she was at the top, and stretching at utmost speed over a broad and sandy track that ran between maize-fields, shorn now of their ripened tassels. The drying stalks clashed and rattled as the wind swept down from the mountains. If their language could have been translated, and that of a stray hyaena which laughed dismally from close by, as Taddy got down to open the gate that led into the orange-grove, it would have meant :

*"Go back! Go back! Not to-night! Not to-night!  
If you, being a Man, would wish to go on hugging an Illusion."*

As it was, Taddy was sensible of a chill. Instead of driving up the avenue, he turned off by a side-way, and took Lorna Doone to the stables. The Hottentot groom to whom he delivered her pointed with a chuckle to another two-wheeled trap that was tilted down under a shed in the yard. But the late visitor did not perceive his meaning. He turned and went soberly back to the house, pondering within himself in what fashion he should break the sad news—the glorious news! He had got to condole with the woman he most ardently desired to marry, on the premature death of her husband. Not an easy task, you must admit, of which to acquit oneself with honour and discretion.

The dew fell chill. He was drenched to the skin through his thin evening clothes, in spite of the flannels every colonial wears. The wind in the branches of the great locusts and the peach and orange trees soughed drearily as he stole noiselessly over the short, crisp lawn to the verandah. There, with its grass-blinds partially drawn and a light showing behind them, was the window where he had sat and stood, sometimes knelt,

beside her as she looked out upon the fading of the sunset—the blossoming of the stars. He had often come in this way, knocking on the window. Once he had looked in and seen her kneeling at a *prie-Dieu* with her open Missal before her. “*I saw you praying,*” he had whispered afterwards. “*Was it for me?*” And she had answered, “Yes.”

He looked in now. She was there, but not engaged in prayer. Lord Donald Courtroyd was with her, and Taddy’s bright bubble of belief, and reverence, and faith, and worship, broke in an instant. And the little Adjutant’s prophecy had come true.

She was only a woman who had formed an ideal of herself, and had not been able to live up to it. She was merely that most dangerous and most pitiable of all humbugs, the humbug who is half in earnest. But we cannot make allowances in the first moment of a great disillusion. To have put all your eggs in one basket rather late in life, and to see that basketful smash, is a sore, sore thing. It is best to cry when that happens, because laughter means madness, or death by a suicide’s hand.

Taddy laughed. As Lorna Doone galloped home over the boulders and through the mud-holes of the gully-road, and the cart jolted and swayed and creaked and groaned like a living thing, he screamed with laughter.

Salt water ran down in the channels of that frantic mirth ; those were tears that tasted bitter, but he laughed on. The great white African moon looked out from behind a tower of Gothic cloud-architecture, and he laughed at her and the hidden sun ; at men—all fools ; women—all vile ; and from the hollow ways demon voices seemed to echo back. It was the Ride of the Goblin Knight—with-out the Lady. Then the wheel struck upon a jutting knee of sandstone and shivered ; the terrified mare bolted home to the barracks with the fragments of the cart behind her,

and Taddy found himself after an interval of blankness before the Church of the Holy Contemplation. Lights burned dimly ; it was the eve of a Feast. The last penitent stole from the confessional as the haggard, dishevelled, mire-bedaubed figure burst over the threshold of the sanctuary. He staggered up a side-aisle, his bloodshot eyes roving fiercely from object to object, dimly discerned in the semi-gloom, his lips drawn back from the gleaming teeth, his whole frame convulsed with paroxysms of silent laughter.

And then a dimness came before his eyes ; he stumbled and sank upon his knee. His head dropped forwards, striking against a wooden beam ; and he lay prone, inert, senseless, under the rude presentment of the sublime tragedy of Calvary.

## VI

The Admirable Mrs. Crichton was completely prostrated by the shock of her bereavement. She had the remains of her unfortunate spouse shipped home per steamer to England, for interment in the family vault at Westwood-Crichton, and followed in another vessel, by which Lord Donald Courtroyd had, as it happened, taken a passage. She was a little surprised, and rather hurt, at receiving no visit of condolence, no sympathetic letter, from Taddy ; but when she heard that he was lying ill, stricken with fever, and delirious, at the barracks, she was ready to make allowances. It was an immense relief to be able to depart without any scene of explanation, any claim, perhaps, for the redemption of a certain pledge, given by her some months previously, when the twelve months inseparable from decorum should have expired. As things turned out, she married Lord Donald Courtroyd in nine months, because Jerry had been killed by the keitloa and sewn up in canvas for transportation by his sorrowing companions

fully twelve weeks before the news reached her. She was quite sure Jerry would not have grudged her those three months. He had always been so generous, poor fellow !

Meanwhile Taddy lay ill of pneumonia and brain-fever ; not the graceful, interesting kind of brain-fever that is wont to strike down the hero or heroine of the modern romance, but the real thing, with all its ugly, sordid, unpleasant details ; complete with its delusions, grotesque and ghastly ; its vertigo and swoonings, its deadly nausea and scorching agonies. He thought himself in hell, and wandered about in the reek and gloom described by the mediæval gazetteers, looking for another spirit as lost as he. But he never met her, though that sad, self-slain creature to whom he had taught a moral lesson, you will remember, years before ; came with other shapes behind her, indistinct and vague, yet awful, too ; and put aside a veil she wore, and showed him a face from the sight of which he shrieked to be delivered. The blow that had prostrated the mind and body had fallen at the proper time, when his newly awakened conscience was smarting and tender, when his nerves were unstrung for lack of the accustomed peg, abandoned at the command of his late divinity. It went hard with the patient, even to the verge of solving the Great Mystery ; but the soul, though prepared for the journey across life's borderland, did not depart. Taddy recovered, with the loss of his crisp eurls and bronze tinting, and how much more ! And as soon as he could hold a pen and write a few words without turning sick and giddy, he sent in his papers, and disappeared—vanished swiftly and suddenly, as the Carrollian butcher who met with a Boojum—his family alone knew whither ; but they were not to be drawn. It was vaguely understood that he had taken a vow of something or other. Wasn't it odd ? But before three years were past nobody remembered to in-

quire ; and the Dapple Greys had got a new prodigy—the son and heir of the great firm of Varnish, Deal and Co., a young subaltern with a pudding-head and a fortune of five millions. He had been put into the regiment to learn to be a gentleman ; but, though he learned a great many other things, he never mastered that.

After her marriage Lady Donald Courtroyd took a less tender interest in the spiritual conditions of her male acquaintances. Courtroyd was, his friends said, Othello without the burnt cork. And though they went much into society, and she was as much admired as ever she had been, she was not attended by the mob of *cavalieri-serventi* who were wont to buzz about her, and fetch and carry for her, in poor Jerry Crichton's time. Courtroyd flew her on a string like a tame sparrow or a paper kite. Between ourselves, I think he ill-used her ; and she certainly followed him about with her eye in a nervous way, and turned pale if he raised his hand in gesticulation—and adored him slavishly. He had not lived among savages for nothing, it was plain. They lived in Odlum Square, close to the Jesuit church in Bracegirdle Street ; but she was not a regular attendant. Courtroyd did not approve of too much religion, among other things.

The Bracegirdle Street church is generally thronged by smart people, many of them sheep of other folds. The building—interior—is of superb proportions ; the paintings, sculptures, altar-vessels, draperies, of the richest ; the music of the best. Fashionable people go there a great deal. Among the Fathers there are eloquent preachers, witty preachers ; men of high and poetic mind, men of taste, men of subtlety, men of the world ; physicians capable of treating every ailment of the soul. Among these there is one who joined the Church comparatively late, and who has a military air, a keen-featured, handsome face, to which, worn and prematurely aged though it be, the soldierly

moustache would seem a fitting ornament. He was, indeed, a cavalryman and a noted ladykiller, it is whispered, whose vocation for the priesthood was revealed to him by a manifestation of the miraculous order.

Father Macallister, however, manifests no extraordinary fitness for his calling. Indeed, he preaches with a doubtful grace. His style is awkward, his delivery terse ; his sermons are summaries of facts established ; his rod strikes upon the desert-rock of heresy without evoking any outgush of repentance. He is not popular in drawing-rooms where pretty ladies who have fulfilled their engagements for the season receive their spiritual director in the half-hour that sandwiches in between the arrival of the jeweller—to submit designs for the resetting of some diamonds—or the visit of the last New Man. But he is exceedingly popular in the slums of the neighbourhood—the crucibles where typhoid is manufactured for the use of all classes ; by the bedside of the sick, in the garret of the starving—*there* Father Macallister shines. Few words and many deeds—that is what the poor need ; and though they take them roughly, without thanks, there may be a gratitude that finds expression in dumbness.

When a smart woman of the world lay dying—and even smart women must die, we know—and her lungs had been always delicate—when Lady Donald Courtroyd lay dying, she sent for Father Macallister.

She lay back upon her lace-edged pillows, gasping her life away. There was reproach in the eyes she lifted to the worn face of Father Taddy—eyes that used to be violet-blue, but from the irises of which the colour was fast fading out.

"I asked them to send for you," she said, in a voice that had lost its colour, like her eyes ; "I thought you would come—now ! Though in all these years you have never come to see me—never once ! "

"Father Gale is your director," the priest said, gently.

"I know—I know! But I wrote—and wrote. . . ."

"I answered every letter faithfully, my daughter," said Father Taddy.

"But they were so curt—so hard—so cold. And after all," the dying woman said, with a plaintive accent of reproach, "it was through me you found conviction—rest in the Church."

He bent his head in answer. He was merciful. He was silent.

Oh! the strange, strange sound of the once-familiar voice, after all the years. That she could reproach him on her dying bed with ingratitude! But then she never knew how she had lost the power to create illusions. She had never heard from the Kaffir stable-boy of Taddy's drive, that wild South African night, up the gully-road. He drooped his head, and bore the reproach from the woman who had betrayed his faith in her. Her eyes flickered and her fingers moved; she muttered a few incoherent words as the nurse raised her head to pour some drops of a restorative between the clicking teeth.

"I sent for you. . . . I wanted to tell you. . . . Oh! it is hard! But I must—it lies upon my conscience. You thought me all goodness in those old days, when you . . . when I . . . and I thought myself so strong, so strong! But there came a time when . . . I was weak. And still I let you go on believing——"

The husky moaning voice died away. The eyelids quivered, but she had no strength for tears. Father Taddy bent over her pillow.

"My daughter—I knew!"

She broke into a pitiful wail—the death-cry of a woman's vanity. But after a little she grew calmer. Her husband was abroad—she had had no children. It would have been a lonely deathbed but for Father Taddy.

The end came, as he touched her brow with the chrism of

Holy Unction. Before the last struggle a ray of consciousness momentarily reanimated the heavy, sinking clay, and flashed into her eyes. She lifted a finger and pointed to her lips, colourless now, like those eyes, and with purple shadows round them.

"Kiss me!" she moaned.

But the man who loved her tore his yearning glance away, and the priest it was who laid the crucifix upon those fluttering lips, and pointed with a look of faith and pardon —up<sup>to</sup> Heaven.

## XVI

### TRANSFERENCE

BAGWORTH had chatted a little in his depressed, invalidy way with the woman he had taken down to dinner. She was a fair, abundant person, with the beginnings of a double chin, whose deep and passionate interest in her food made the civil babble of the man beside her seem even more trivial than it was. “How *can* people be so wicked as to *talk*,” she thought, “in a house like this, where the *chef* is paid four hundred a year, and the *sole Normande* is as good as you get it at Sylvani’s!” The *entrée* was *canard à la Rouennaise*, and absorbed her so completely that she would not have heard the expiring shrieks of her firstborn. And the pretty girl on Bagworth’s right had been taken down by the man of her heart, and was making the most of it. Consequently Bagworth was unemployed. His dinner had consisted of a lean cutlet and a bit of dry toast, washed down with a glass of claret.

There were several other dyspeptics of both sexes at the table, and not all of them had, like Bagworth, resisted the insidious allurements of savoury dishes. Bagworth smiled grimly as he scanned their countenances, already flushed and puffy, or pallid and cadaverous. He knew the kind of night they were going to have, and how they would feel in the morning. But, the sweets having made their appearance, the lady whom he had taken down was free to bestow a little of her attention upon him.

“ You have made a dreadfully bad dinner !” There was  
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commiseration in her tone, and Bagworth was painfully conscious of it.

" You, on the contrary, have made an uncommonly good one."

He meant to be sarcastic, but she smiled beamingly, removing every lingering doubt about the double chin, and throwing her dimples into strong relief.

" Thank Heaven, yes! What is life worth when one cannot eat ?"

" I am," said Bagworth, " in a position to enlighten you." He made a duck's-egg with his right thumb and forefinger.

" Nothing!" she said, with feeling. " Oh! how true. How I have felt that !"

" You are not going to tell me," pleaded Bagworth, " that you ever carried pepsin tabloids at your *porte-bonheur*, and rose from a sleepless pillow to toast the breaking of the dismal day in dilute carbonate of soda ?"

She nodded affirmatively, for an *omelette soufflée* demanded her attention, and secured it.

" Astounding !" said Bagworth. " Marvellous ! Prodigious !" He took another glass of claret, and looked longingly at a cheese-straw.

" My husband and I were both sufferers from acute nervous dyspepsia," volunteered his neighbour. " He, poor dear, practically lived on oatmeal biscuits and raw minced meat. He is now——" The jet embroideries upon her corsage heaved as she sighed.

Bagworth, who, like most bachelors, was always intensely sorry for a widow, bowed his head reverently. " I understand. Please don't say it if it gives you pain."

" But it does not give me pain," said Bagworth's neighbour. " There is my husband." She indicated with her eyelids a red-faced, thin-necked, middle-aged man who sat on the opposite side of the table, three down, who had struck

Bagworth as being frankly greedy, and whom he had envied even while he despised. And seeing him vigorously eating salted almonds, careless of consequences, Bagworth envied him again, conscious of the impending rebellion of the cutlet concealed behind his own white waistcoat.

" You were cured ? You were both cured ?"

There was a gleam of almost fierce interest in his usually dull and weary eyes. " You went to some specialist—the treatment was successful ? Was it Pooker-Gore or Sawly-Oates ?"

" Why do you mention Pooker-Gore and Sawly-Oates ?" asked the fair neighbour with the excellent appetite and the incipient double chin.

" Because they are the only men I have not consulted," said Bagworth.

" Relieve your mind of them !" said Bagworth's neighbour. " They did not cure my husband or myself. In fact," she added, completely taking away Bagworth's breath, always short after food, " we are not cured at all !"

" What ?" ejaculated Bagworth, dropping his eyeglass with a click. " Wha—what ? I beg your—I beg !—but wha—"

" Of course, you find it difficult to believe me," said his neighbour, whose husband was now finishing a dish of bonbons. " But we are neither of us cured. We have good appetites and excellent digestions at this moment, I rejoice to say. But"—she consulted a tiny diamond watch—" we shall only have them as long as they are wanted, that is, until about four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. The fact is—they are hired !"

She made the announcement with so perfect an air of regretful candour that Bagworth could only gasp. And the red-faced man opposite was taking tawny port with walnuts.

" I will smoke, thank you," said his neighbour, as the cigarette-waggon wheeled her way.

Bagworth gave her a light, and chose a cigar from his case in a bewildered way. The cutlet was restive, and the shock imparted by the discovery of the unhinged condition of his neighbour's mind had made things worse. "They oughtn't to let her out," he reflected gloomily, as she leaned a round elbow on the table and blew smoke-rings. "Might do something violent with a table-knife. They oughtn't to let her out!"

"I am quite sane, I assure you," said the subject of his reflections.

Bagworth, flushed with confusion and cutlet, could only stammer that he was certain of it.

"Not quite," said his neighbour, smiling at him through the smoke-rings. "Thank you, I will take coffee," she said.

"Forgive me," said Bagworth, "and let me offer you a liqueur!"

But the proposal clouded his neighbour's brow. She shook her head sorrowfully.

"There is no sky without a cloud, and the most excellent digestive apparatus owns its weak point. The woman from whom I hired mine drew the line at liqueur." She sighed. "It is poison to her, though she can accommodate everything else."

"You are not joking? You are absolutely serious?" said Bagworth, looking hard at her.

"And sane!" added his neighbour, as she peeled a peach. "Have you, twentieth centurian that you are, never heard of Hypnobiologie Transference and Mental Organotherapy?"

"It's a tough mouthful—after dinner," Bagworth said.

"For you," said his neighbour, "but not for me, or for my husband, or for any of the other guests at this table who owe their present enjoyment, and will be indebted for their subsequent tranquillity, to the treatment of Professor Pinto, the discoverer of Transference."

"You don't mean—" stuttered Bagworth.

"I do!" she said, and she meant it. "The Professor has plenty of clients in the best sets——"

"His name, I think you said, is——"

"Professor Albinio Pinto. His Institute is in Lower Brook Street, Number Ninety A. You had better pay him a visit," advised Bagworth's neighbour, "next time you accept a dinner-invitation. I do not call his terms unreasonable. For the use of a pair of good appetites, with digestions to match, George—that's my husband—paid eight guineas. Eight guineas to be free for one night and half a day from the miseries of nervous dyspepsia! For we are both of us sufferers." She sighed gently. "We shall be sufferers again—after four o'clock to-morrow! You cannot conceive——"

"I can conceive getting, supposing one was a sensitive subject, a certain degree of imaginary relief from hypnotic suggestion," began Bagworth. "But that one should be able to call upon this man—as one would call upon a tradesman—and bespeak an appetite for one's dinner——"

"Not alone an appetite for one's dinner," corrected Bagworth's neighbour. "You don't just begin to know the far-reaching extent of the discovery when you talk like that. Any capacity, mental or physical, can be obtained on temporary loan, for a fee paid in advance at Professor Pinto's Institute. For instance, there is a pretty woman here to-night who has an ugly laugh."

"I know who you mean!" said Bagworth.

"Go and talk to her after dinner," advised his neighbour, "and you will find that she has suddenly acquired a laugh to match her face."

"Which is charming," said Bagworth.

"The face is her own," acquiesced his neighbour, "but the laugh is not. Look down the table to your left. The man at the corner, telling a smart story at which people are sniggering, is the dullest bore in London!"

"He's my brother-in-law," said Bagworth ; "and I quite agree!"

"He has hired, for this night only, from Professor Pinto, said the lady emphatically, "the complete mental equipment of a good second-rate *raconteur* and professional dinner-out. Take my own case. I have expectations from an aunt. She is a very vinegary, unpleasant old lady, and, of course, expects me to be genuinely dutiful and affectionate whenever we meet. Now, the truth is that I can't bear her! and so——"

"Go on, go on!" entreated Bagworth, his dull eyes on fire.

"So when I go to pay Aunt Susan my monthly duty-visit, I hire a guinea's worth of genuine daughterly devotion from Pinto," explained Bagworth's neighbour calmly. "It is so real that the old lady is in eestasies—and it lasts until I tear myself away—sometimes longer. Once——"

"Did you say Lower Brook Street?" asked Bagworth. He wrote down the complete address upon his cuff, and called upon the Professor next day at the consulting-hour of eleven. The house was sumptuously furnished with red plush, gilding, Wardour Street old oak, and statuettes of Italian biscuit—smiling, ogling, or leering in the pronounced way usual with such works of modern art.

The Professor was tall, lean, and swarthy, with abundant black ringlets, flowing necktie, a bulbous nose and lower lip, and rolling ebon eyes. His command of English was extraordinary, if the idiom was of another clime.

"How think you that I spiek him?" he demanded of Bagworth, when the opening civilities had passed. "I apprehend to make some faults, but any rate he is to spick always, right or bad!"

"Couldn't possibly be better," said Bagworth, and mentioned the name of the lady client who had supplied the Professor's address.

"Ah! Never am I to myself, the ladies they como everydays!" said the Professor, his shoulders at his un-washed ears. "I have not a most pleasure in the world—than to oblige the ladies! . . . Handsome angelz!" He kissed his grimy finger-tips, and added: "And when not handsome, adorable, all same!" He struck an attitude. "Now, what can I do to oblige at yourself?" And as Bagworth, flushing to the cheekbones in his dyspeptic way, hesitated to explain, the Professor did so for him. . . . "You are indigestive—dyspeptic—neurotic, and come at me like all the others for an appetite?" said Professor Pinto. "Upon the end of the finger I have your case. Your ancestros have drink too much, play too much, make love too much, eat too much at themselves—*comprendér?* Consequently their grandson have descend into the present day without a stomach, without nerves, without not nothing! Prescribe the medical mens, the patient but continue to suffer more strong. Then you tell the medicals go *diáblo*, and you eome at me!" He plunged at a wheeled stand, and slapped open a vast album of photographs. "Regard to this photograph of healthy young man with excellent appetite, and number one digestion. You shall have use of that young man's inside for small dinner-party for small charge three guineas. That you will be pleased I swear you faith!" The Professor smote his chest. "Faith of Albinio Pinto!"

Bagworth looked at his watch. It was nearly twelve. "Look here," he said—he was a careful young man—"make it two guineas, and I'll take your friend round to my club for lunch. I haven't eaten the meal for months."

"I shall agree!" said the Professor, nodding, as Bagworth produced two sovereigns and two shillings. Pinto pocketed the money with a gleam of his black, tawny-whited eyes, and "Como to this way!" he said, invitingly pulling back the curtain of an inner sanctum containing an apparatus

resembling a dentist's chair, a radio-electric lamp fitted with a powerful lens, and a reading-stand. "Be enough obliging to sit at this chair, yourself compose, look to your front, think at nothing that troubles!" commanded the Professor, and Bagworth seated himself as directed. Upon the reading-stand, which the Professor placed in front of the chair, previously tilted at a certain angle, Pinto placed the album of photographs, open at the portrait of the healthy young man. He arranged the lens, deftly switched on the light, and Bagworth blinked owlishly in the almost insupportable radiance.

"I say—" he protested.

"*Silêncio!*!" ordered the Professor curtly.

The light beat dazzlingly on Bagworth's eyeballs. For relief he stared at the portrait of the healthy young man. And that blunt-nosed, chuckle-headed personage seemed to smile at him encouragingly, his thick lips revealing a large mouth furnished with a full complement of teeth. Then the figure seemed to swell, and grew as large as life; and the light became a thousand, and with the usual singing in the ears and the customary sense of suffocation Bagworth passed into unconsciousness.

"You take it very quiet, the hypnoty," said the Professor, as Bagworth reopened his eyes. "The ladies, they have from me take out the hairs, they have do me some kicks, they have scratched me the face with their nails, before this. You grunta a little, it may be, but otherwise quiet as young sheep. You will go now and have the luneh, carefully remembering that lobster quarrels with the young man."

"The young man?" Bagworth stared stupidly.

"The young man whose digestion you have assume for time being," said Professor Pinto. "Good-a-day!"

"It's a swindle," said Bagworth, walking towards Piccadilly. "That unsoaped Hispano-Portuguese is a charlatan

of the worst. By Jove ! I feel hungry. Can it be possible?"

The much-missed sense of vacaney, the tender yearning, long unfelt, for the savoury and the succulent, assured him that it was. He ran up the steps of the Younger Sons' Club as gaily as a boy. He electrified the man who waited at his table by the ravages he made upon the viands. He astonished friends who toyed with food at neighbouring tables. He took twice of roast, and called for a second helping of pudding, indulged unrestrainedly in Stilton cheese, and washed everything down with huge draughts of lager. Clearly that healthy young man must have hailed from the German Fatherland. Then he went into the smoking-room, put up his legs, and waited in some anxiety. But no painful symptoms heralded retributory anguish. The healthy young man was staunch. Over a cigar his lessee formulated a plan, and next day he called again upon Professor Pinto.

" Ha ! you are satisfy !" said the Professor. " You have eat enough without afterwards suffering. I wage that you have come to hire again my healthy young man ? Him, I deplore, you cannot get ! but I will you supply with another. What ? It is something else for which you require ?"

" Speaking in confidence——" began Bagworth.

The Professor winked. " We talk here nose at nose," he said. " My honour professional I pledge at you for *silêncio*. Please empty yourself without the littlest reserve."

Bagworth emptied himself accordingly. He told the Professor of the long-standing estrangement from his family, which had been partly responsible for his dyspepsia. He explained that the Bagworths of Deershire were not as wealthy as their extensive landed possessions gave the world to believe ; that his elder brother, the present baron, had played polo with the bank-securities upon succeeding to the title ; and that he, the younger son, was expected to contract

an advantageous marriage with the wealthy but unattractive heiress of a neighbouring—and unencumbered—estate. With high-bred delicacy he reserved the lady's name, and only hinted that her unconcealed passion for himself had, to the intense disgust of his family, been hitherto unrequited. But the Professor grasped at the truth with a sagacity quite surprising.

"I have no pains to conceive at you," he said, his dingy finger against his bulbous nose. Before Bagworth could prevent it, he found himself embraced, pressed to a bosom garnished with an imitation cat's-eye and diamond pin, and saluted by lips that smelt of garlic. "Here the *utilidad* of my system shall serve to astonishment. Be at ease, Señor!" He charged at the bulky album of photographs and slapped it open, and beckoned Bagworth with an ecstatic gesture to come, come and see.

"Behold here a subject upon my list, a great deal fine man of personal attraction, and disposition much amorous. But there are others. . . . You shall choice! The wealthy Miss in the country shall be surprise and delight to discover at you a lover of the most ideal. Behold again!" He slapped the album open at another page.

"That fellow," said Bagworth, "looks as though he could fall in love with anything!" He contemplated with interest the impassioned lineaments of the portrait.

"He is a *león* of the *desierto* in his passions!" said the Professor, "and, because of the esteem I entertain at you, you shall have him for ten guineas the week. Reflect upon the happiness you confer at your family. Think of the rapture of the Miss when she discover at herself genuinely beloved by the man she have for so long adore. Imagine what benedictions shall follow the union of two hearts that thump at one. And take my young man—him cheaps—at ten pounds!"

Bagworth thought a minute and concluded the bargain.

He promised to inform the Professor by letter of the progress of affairs. Subjoined is a note that distinguished hypnobiologist received some three weeks later.

STAGTHORN HALL, DEERSHIRE.

"Mr. F. Bagworth begs to inform Professor Albinio Pinto that the young man rented of him is going on favourably, and has given, up to date, every satisfaction. Mr. Bagworth thinks he must be a Spaniard, because he insists upon playing the guitar under the lady's window at night, and eats tomatoes raw. Could the first-named tendency be checked at headquarters, this being a rheumatic county? He has also threatened to stab a rival with a paper-knife, and this sort of thing creates gossip. A reply from the Professor would oblige."

But the Professor only sent receipts when the weekly ten pounds rental was paid, and demands when it hung fire. However, two months after Bagworth's marriage that Benedict received the following letter written in a sloping handwriting on a sheet of thin violet paper :

LOWER BROOK STREET.

"i can't, my dear sir, express you of the felicity it proeure me to do my compliment at your marriage. This write is also to inform at you that the young man what i let you sum time behind at ten pounds per week unjoyfully is deado of an automobil what galloped him over in the Totnaham Court Road. This is to speak that i have another at stock i would let at a same price. Your reply obliging respectfully attended.

"ALBINIO HONORHO DA PINTO,  
"(*medicār and maestro científico*)."

"I thought something might have happened, but I wasn't sure," reflected Bagworth. "Still, a man can't go

on for ever singing duets with his wife, and leading her out on the terrace to look at the moon, and gnashing his teeth with jealousy whenever the curate calls! . . . Tottenham Court Road, too. There were things about that fellow made me feel certain he was a waiter. For instance, his habit of kissing housemaids stamped him, in my opinion, as a complete bounder. Of course, one is always sorry for a man who has been cut off suddenly, but in this chap's case I think it was about time!"

And, with a slight, virtuous shudder, Bagworth tore up the Professor's letter into minute fragments, and dropped them into the waste-paper basket.

## XVII

### A SUBALTERN'S HEALING

STACEY-MURCHISON, suffering from general disinclination to do anything, was lying on the Rossmore sofa in his quarters, when Doughty, his soldier-servant, a staid and moral Scotchman, announced "the young lady who had been sent for express."

Stacey-Murchison, pink to his hair-parting, first denied having sent for any young lady, and then strenuously refused to believe that any young lady had come.

"She says ye did, urr-gent," contended Doughty; "no absent treatment would dae. The operr-ater must come wi'oot delay, an' she took the twalve-thretty for Aldershott from Waterloo in consequence. See for yourself! There's a hired station-flee dunc below, wi' a weary skeleton in horse-hide between the shafts o' it, that stoppit before the stane steps leadin' to the Officers' Mess as the Colonel and the Adjutant were comin' oot. 'Hoots!' says the Colonel, 'whatna' hae we here?' and the neb o' him glooed like a Sooth African sunset wi' fair passion, as he keeked in an' saw her sittin' wi' her wee baeg upo' her lap an' a smile on her face like a cat lappin' cream in a dairy. I wadna doot but ye will hear oopenions laterr; but for the noo, will I no' be showing her in to ye?'"

Stacey-Murchison swore, and would have bounded from the sofa, but that a feminine *frou-frou* of silk-linings, and a cool, self-possessed "Good-afternoon" paralyzed his bounding powers. The door that had admitted the visitor was behind him; he lay flat and looked up over his eye-

brows, and saw an alert, neatly-attired, undeniably blonde young lady in rolled-gold pince-nez, who might have been a lady typist or a secretary or a Board-school teacher. She calmly waited until the scandalized Doughty had handed her a chair and quitted the apartment ; then, deftly picking up an embroidered camel - hair *numnah* which Stacey-Murchison had kicked off the sofa, she spread it over him, and sat down facing him.

"I am glad that in the midst of suffering that doubtless seemed real to you," said the self-possessed young lady, "you had the moril curridge"—her accent was slightly of the Cockney, cockneyfied—"to have recourse to Us."

"I'm frightfully afraid," mumbled Stacey-Murchison, with his mouth full of *numnah*—in the young lady's zeal she had drawn it up over his face—"that I don't know who 'us' is. I—I mean that I am not quite posted as to who you are." He coughed, for the blonde young lady looked severe.

"You will be better instructed soon, I 'ope!" said the young lady—who occasionally omitted to sound the aspirate which is the Rubicon between the Masses and the Classes. "'Uxley once 'azarded that the only absolute science was the Science of Theology. This, redeemed from all dogmas and creeds by the refining and filtering process invented by the Mother, contains no element of mental suggestion, or hauto-suggestion, and involves nothing more than a Practical Application of the Spiritual Law. To grapple with Spiritual Facts, compre'end and use them for the Regeneration and Healing of those hills that 'uman flesh, unsupported by Faith in a 'Igher Intelligence, is heir to, is the Mission of every Christian Scientist.'"

"I presume, then, that you——" began Stacey-Murchison ; but the porthole was smartly closed.

"I presume that you, as we gathered at the 'Ead Office from your telegram, suppose yourself to be suffering from

the effects of an accident sustained through the fall of your animal while hunting ?" said the young lady, briskly.

" I'm beginning to have a faint glimmering of the reason why you are here," said Stacey-Murchison. " But that is on the landing below this, and if you will kindly——"

" My business is with you," said the determined young lady, opening her bag and producing a tuning-fork and a serious-looking volume. " One of your knees is cut to the bone, you think ; you imagine also that what you call your spine has been badly ricketed." She struck the tuning-fork on the back of a chair, producing a vibrating hum which gave Stacey-Murchison goose-flesh all over. " I will now sing a hymn," she said. " But what are you grinding your teeth for ?"

" Always . . . from a boy . . . set 'em on edge . . ." mumbled the agonized subaltern.

" Mere imagination," said the young lady. " You have no teeth, no knee, no spine really. You are a mere aggregation of material atoms, and matter doesn't exist. It is a Great Truth, and you must gape to swaller it ; but once it is down, it changes everything——"

" Like a Cockle's Pill," suggested Stacey-Murchison, with a faint twinkle in his eye. But the young lady sang her hymn, quite through, and read a chapter out of her book, and then asked whether his knee did not feel better ? and he said he had no pain in it whatever. Then she inquired about his ricketed spine, and he said it had never been ricketed at all, and worked quite easily. And the young lady's rolled-gold-mounted glasses quite sparkled with triumph.

" I told you Pain was a mere illusion," she said, " and I trust as a man of honour you will testify to your cure. It would have been all the same if you had had catarrh or cancer, the Applied Principles of Christian Science would have cured either quite as easily."

" Or suppose I had taken poison—prussic acid for

choice," queried Stacey-Murchison with a pleasant smile. "Would the Applied Principles have worked as efficaciously?"

"All you would have needed to do in that case," said the young lady, "would have been to say to yourself, 'I am not poisoned! I won't be poisoned! there is no such thing as poison, and Death does not exist!'"

"Uncommonly useful formula—what?" said Stacey-Murchison. "In event of a lyddite shell bursting between a man's legs, all *he* would have to do would be to say, 'I am not blown into little bits! I won't be blown into little bits! there is no such thing as being blown into little bits!' and the rest of it, if he had time. And lyddite as a hurrier is rather more urgent than prussic acid. Um?!"

The young lady put her book back in her bag, and snapped it, and said she had no doubt Christian Science would apply in either of the cases Stacey-Murchison had mentioned; but in the meantime, as she had healed his cut-to-the-bone kneecap and his ricked spine, would he kindly write out a cheque for five guineas payable to the Manager of the London Central Branch Office?

Then Murchison threw off the *numnah*, jumped off the Rossmore, moved very nimbly to the door, opened it, and bowed from the hips, quite in Levée style. . . .

"My! how you walk!" cried the young lady, flushed with professional pride—"as if nothing had been the matter with you!"

"In point of fact, nothing was the matter with me," said her late patient. "The spine and kneecap of which you are in search belong to Parkinson of Ours, whose quarters are on the landing below. I tried to tell you in the beginning, but you stopped me with the blanket. Thanks all the same for an exceedingly entertaining and instructive séance. And good-afternoon. Don't forget, the landing below." And he bowed the indignant young lady-healer out.

## XVIII

### TODMINSTER'S THIRST

#### I

THE Regality Theatre Syndicate, Limited, had met behind the closed doors of the Acting-Manager's sanctum full half an hour before. The Manageress, Miss Lilli Delosme, occupied the saddle-bag sofa in a *soufflé* of frills. The Legal Adviser to the Syndicate occupied the post of importance at the knee-hole table, before a pile of ledgers. The Stage Director sat unassumingly upon the official safe, and the Acting-Manager leaned, with folded arms and a countenance carefully divested of all expression, against the patent American hard-wood chimney-piecee. The Financier's bosom friend and *alter ego*, Hambridge Ost—a small, fatigued-looking man with carefully plastered hair and a prismatic taste in neckties—had, with some little difficulty, owing to the general limpness of the subject, disposed the Financeir—John Sholto St. Johnes, Marquess of Todminster—in a chair.

"He's been like that ever since yesterday," explained the Manageress, whose rendering of "*Dicky-Bird, Dicky-Bird, Peck Me in the Eye*" had, according to Haddock of the *Daily Bouncer*, "won the exquisite exponent of the vocal and choreographic arts her unfading place in a thousand English bosoms." "Nerves just anyhow, and legs all over the place, because the Duke has had the indecency to go and marry again. Don't say you boys haven't seen it in the paper!"

The Manageress would have expatiated on the smarting

subject, but the Acting-Manager and the Legal Adviser to the Syndicate had already jammed their heads together over the *Morning Boast*.

"On the 5th instant, at the Free-Believers' Tabernacle, Gretna-on-Groats, Blankshire, Drogo Alexander Henry, eighth Duke of Crags, to Ann Emily, only daughter of William Sewings, M.P., of 1,000, Lombard Street and "The Hollies," Chiswick."

"Todo tells me," pursued Miss Delosme, "that the new Duchess is quite the fogey, with plainly-parted hair, and visits paupers in cellars with baskets of arrowroot when she isn't sitting on platforms at Anti-Resurrection meetings—"

"Vivisection meetings, dear lady," corrected Hambridge Ost.

"I call the whole thing immoral!" pouted Miss Delosme. "And the Duke seventy, if he's a day. And to think of him cutting Todo out of everything in the way of property that isn't strictly thingummy-bobbed—"

"Entailed, dear lady," corrected Hambridge Ost.

"Strictly entailed. And Todo says that nothing but the title and Crags Castle—which is a kind of ruined stone barn with an ivy bonnet on—legally belongs to the heir presumptuous—"

"Presumptive, dear lady," sighed Hambridge, adding, as the Financier took the amber handle of his stick out of his hitherto speechless mouth, "I think Lord Todminster has something to say."

"What I want to say is this!" said the very blotchy and debilitated young English nobleman addressed. "I say the Duke's name had better be left out of the question. The Duke had a perfect right to gratify himself—and he has gratified himself! That's what I say. And—though they didn't think it worth while to ask me to the wedding, what I say is—I wish the young couple every happiness!"

"Bravo!" cried Hambridge Ost enthusiastically.

"Shut up, Hambridge!" said Todminster. "There's another thing I want to say," he continued, looking round upon the other members of the Syndicate. "It's with regard to the profits of this musical play we've been running, *The Idiot Girl*, in which I invested my little remaining pile—eight thou., odd—six months ago."

"Well said!" exclaimed Hambridge ecstatically. "Encore! *Bis!*"

"What I say is," went on Todminster, "that as we've played the piece to crowded houses night after night for a jolly considerable time, I rather think,"—he jammed his eyeglass into one bloodshot eye, and made a face to fix it—"I rather think the time has come for me to touch my whack of profits!" He looked round the office, over which the utterance seemed to have cast a damping fog, encountering blank eyes set in expressionless faces. And the eyeglass dropped with a surprised click, as he added: "For I presume there are profits?"

"Fifty per cent. of the *net profits*, my lord," the Legal Adviser glibly explained, "not of the gross receipts. And in Clause 8 you undertake that your share shall not be withdrawn from the Syndicate's Emergency Fund until—"

"Until the Day of Judgment, you damn swindling ead!" said Todminster, with a thick ferocity that made the Legal Adviser quake behind his ledgers. Then Todminster got up on his uncertain legs and blundered to the side-board, filled a tumbler with brandy splashed with Apollinaris, emptied it, and passed out at the stage-door a few minutes later a doubly-ruined man. His hair clung to his wet forehead in streaks; his bloodshot eyes were like the eyes of a sweating, goaded, over-driven bull, worried by yelping dogs and chased by howling butcher's-boys with cudgels. The dissipated, worthless, debauched, may keep

a sense of honour ; the thriftless and unconscientious may rely upon the probity of others ; the untrustworthy may trust, and suffer as keenly as their moral superiors—at the discovery of deceit. Those thousands invested in the production of the blaring, glaring variety-show, which had appealed so irresistibly to the savage childishness of the modern taste, were all that remained of a goodly sum inherited by the prodigal at his majority, his mother's *dot* of eighty thousand pounds.

These men to whom he had lent money, this woman upon whose dresses, vehicles, jewels, furniture he had lavished thousands, had robbed him. By the jeering triumph in their eyes it was plain that they guessed him, as he knew himself, to be penniless—a money-pump run dry. The landlord of his Piccadilly chambers had that morning served him with a writ ; his rows of boots, his clothes and jewellery, sporting pictures, and silver-gilt dressing-plate were in jeopardy at the baliff's hands. The gorgeously furnished Mount Street flat, occupied by Miss Delosme, knew him as its landlord and frequent guest. Well, thither he would go no more.

People stared as the hatless figure with the dishevelled hair and the blotchy face reeled down the Strand ; but drunken men are no novelty, and this was to the experienced eyes of certain large men in blue serge—a swell. He turned off to the right quite aimlessly before reaching Temple Bar, and increased his pace by degrees to a run as the pavement sloped under his stumbling feet. Then he tripped, fell, and rolled down some steps, striking his head heavily, and in that quiet place lay long, staring up at the racing white clouds and the blue sky, until he mustered strength to stagger to his feet again.

“ My gracious ! you *are* a figure of fun, and no mistake ! ”

Todminster's vague glance rested on a young woman in the attire of the respectable lower class, and wearing

a Salvation Army bonnet, who stood near an iron seat from which she had risen, resting upon it a large, dingy calico bag, evidently containing something bulky and heavy. There was no mockery in her tone, no amusement in her sincere grey eyes, but something controlling, sustaining, helpful. His muddled brain slowly cleared, as he stiffly dropped upon the seat beside her, and he became conscious of grave old buildings round about, of twittering sparrows, trees in their green summer dress of leaves, and of a little fountain playing within an iron cage.

"If that water wasn't railed in, an' I could wet your 'andkerchief," said the young woman, in her soft and soothing voice, "I could do somethink for that nasty cut on your 'ead. . . . There's nothink like cold water—when it's clean—for the inside as well as out, and if somebody 'ad rubbed that well into you when you were a kid, you'd be a different young man to-day. Anybody can see with 'arf a' eye that you've been on the spree for days and weeks, and if you 'ave a mother"—Todminster winced—"or a wife, my advice is, go 'ome to 'er, ask 'er forgiveness, and take the pledge, right off, or join the Army!"

"I ammabliged by your goorravice," said the object of the young woman's address; "but I have been in the Army."

"Not the Salvation Army!" cried the young woman incredulously.

"Norri'zackly," said Todminster. "Guards. Found miliary life in many respess unnesirable—lef' the Service in cons'quence." He waved his hand grandly. "Priva' reasons, unnerecessary t' explain! But the connition of morals in the Servish leaves mush to be resired!"

"I can guess what you are now," said the young woman knowingly. "A draper's gent. Aint' I right? Them clothes of yours, though a bit too swelly for my taste, was lovely before you spoilt 'em; and them cuff-links you

'ave on might be diamonds, if I 'adn't seen 'em on a card for one-an'-six. Where's your place of business ? Oxford Street or the Edgware Road is what I said when you caught my eye ; and won't your old man take you on again if you promise to keep sober for the future ?"

" His Grace has issued his ultima-hic-tum !" said Todminster, clenching his shaky right hand until the bleeding knuckles started into painful relief. " Says he'll give me one chance ; on his own connitions. Six months of sobriety the stipularid term. Six months of moral connuct and mineral warrers, six months of going to bed with the little hic-birds and gettin' up with the early worm, six—" His voice trailed off into silence. His heavy head sank forward.

" And can't you turn over a new leaf and try ?" asked the velvety voice with the vulgar Cockney accent.

" My dear young lady—" Todminster lifted his eyebrows and shook his aching head. " Impossible. Too late. Bound to break down and go under ! An' the sooner over—the better ! For all parties concerned !" He tried to laugh, but a dry sob rose in his throat.

The young woman leaned a little nearer to him, pitiable, blinking object that he was. " Worse than you has pulled themselves together and got back into respectable situations again. I ain't kidding. I've knowed, I've seen—I've 'elped ! Don't tell me you couldn't—don't you dare to say it's too late ! It ain't, so help me Gawd ! Oh ! why ain't father here to 'ave a talk to you ?"

" Is your—is your father a medical man ?" asked Todminster.

" Bless you ! not a bit of it," said the young woman in the Salvation bonnet, laughing and blushing. " He's a common working man, just as I'm a common working woman, but he 'as a knack with habitual drunks that's

wonderful. He teaches 'em to overcome the cravin'. He's cured dozens—father has—he'd be a great man if 'e 'ad 'is due. We live in a little back street off 'Ammer-smith Broadway, near the railway arches—Clara Place, it's called. And father and me are boot-closers—we does hand-sewing for City firms that 'ave faddy customers what won't 'ave nothing to do with machine-stitched wear—lucky for us ! And I was on my way 'ome from the cutter's with this"—she indicated the dingy bag—"and I'd ask you to come wi' me to father now, if you didn't mind being seen walking in company with a young woman who was carrying such a common thing ?"

Todminster laid a shaky white hand with bleeding knuckles upon the burden.

"I shall carry it myself," he said, with quite an access of determination and self-reliance. "And now, my dear young lady"—he straightened his tall form carefully, repressing a hiccup—"we will go and see your father!"

## II

So the Marquess of Todminster, in company with a bag of unclosed upper-leathers, and a young woman wearing a Salvation bonnet, walked hatless out of his social sphere and vanished. The family solicitor telegraphed to his Grace of Crags, Scotland Yard made a few invertebrate efforts to trace the missing man, Todminster's landlord laid hands upon his Jermyn Street effects, a horse or two at a well-known trainer's establishment changed owners and names, Miss Delosme flitted from the Mount Street flat with all her own personal property and a great deal besides, and Mr. Piperno, Professor of Moral Calisthenics and Reclaimer of Inebriates, received a new boarder at his commodious six-roomed establishment at Clara Place, the Broadway, Hammersmith. The few sovereigns and the lonely ten-pound note Todminster had about him upon

the morning of his great disillusionment defrayed the Professor's charges for a considerable time, the said charges being extremely moderate—fourteen shillings a week. Upon the advice of Miss Piperno, whose Christian prefix was Anæmia—the deceased Mrs. Piperno having nourished a preference for “romantic names”—the clothes in which Todminster had first presented himself to her notice were repaired, carefully brushed, and laid away in a drawer—“Against the time when you're fit to go back to business,” said Anæmia cheerfully. “And, in my opinion—though drapers' gents are expected to dress showy, and that afternoon lounge-suit and faney neekwear may have knocked the young ladies in the Show Department silly—I like you better in that cheap line of moleskins you bought for eight-and-six, an' that Salvation guernsey I 'ad by me. I'd bin keepin' it for father, but 'e 'angs back from enlistin' under the Flag for good, though 'e likes the singin' and preachin' a fair treat.”

She sat at her boot-elosing in the front kitemen sitting-room, which had a clean starched muslin blind and a large pelargonium in the window. The back kitchen was sacred to Mr. Piperno, who at that moment rapped on the wall with a lapstone, and called out in rather a husky voee :

“Time !”

“There's father calling,” said Anæmia brightly. “It's time for your lesson in self-restraint and aleo'olic avoidance, and anyone wiked enough to be doubtful of father's gift in 'ealing 'as only to look at your eyes and complexion after only five months of the treatment to be struck convicted and repentant for ever after! And your hand almost as steady as a rock, and your legs a-taking of you where you want to go,” she coneluded triumphantly, “without any jibbin'. A new man, that's what you'll be, before your governor's six months are over! Was your

fried sossidges and coffee to your liking ? I notice your appetite gets better as you go on."

"The sausages and the coffee were super-excellent!" said Todminster.

"There's a long word," cried Anæmia, in motherly delight. "What a 'ash you'd have made of it five months ago—wouldn't you?"

"It's probable—it's quite certain that I should," agreed Todminster. He got up from his Windsor chair, nodded pleasantly to Anæmia, and went into the back-kitchen. Its occupant, a small, grimy, muscular man, with angry green eyes, a bristly beard, and a shock of crimson hair, looked up from his work to observe :

"Late again, young feller!"

"I'm simply awfully sorry!" began Todminster. "Upon my word——"

"Don't come over me with no soft sawder," said Mr. Piperno sternly, "because it won't go down ! You've come to me to be reformed of your bad 'abits, and unpunctualness is one of 'em, together with sloth." He deftly connected the end of a waxed twine with a hog's bristle, and continued : "Sloth is to be overcome by early risin', lightin' the fire, and sweepin' out the kitchen an' back-yard. Exercise is another good thing for the lazy—here's a bundle of closed uppers to be taken down to Finsbury Pavement by an' by. As for intemperance, which is your crying sin, we're goin' to try a back-fall with it as usual. 'Ave you a bob?"

Todminster produced the coin.

"You take that jug off the dresser an' get a quart o' beer at the Stag and Castle," commanded Mr. Piperno ; "an' as you're about it, git three-penn'orth of unsweetened gin as well—the other kind is un'olesome after a full meal. There's a cracked blue mug you can bring that in. Don't you try to drink none in the Bottle and Jug department,

for the landlord is a pal o' mine, an' won't allow it ; and don't you dip your beak in the liquors coming 'ome, becos' I shall know it if you do."

Todminster looked down on the swart and truculent little man with an odd expression as he took the indicated articles of crockery from the dresser.

Ten minutes later he occupied a backless chair in the middle of Mr. Piperno's Moral Academy for Inebriates. His extended right hand sustained the beer-jug, on the summit of which a snowy head of foam mantled and dimpled in a seductive way. In his left hand was the mug with the gin in it. Mr. Piperno looked upon his neophyte, thus poised between two temptations, and Todminster looked at Mr. Piperno.

"What a thing is the passion for liquor!" said the boot-closer, scowling very savagely first at the mug, and then at the beer-jug, and then back again from the beer-jug to the mug. "It reddens the nose, infeebulates the constitution, empties the pockets, and breaks up the 'appy 'ome. There you set, a brand what I am about to snatch from the burning. In one 'and you 'old Destruction in the shape of gin ; in the other Ruin, in the agreeable fluid form of beer." The Professor smacked his lips longingly. "Look me in the eye"—he fixed his small green eyes blinkingly on Todminster's brown ones—"look me in the eye, and say after me : ' My friend, I do not wish to drink of this beer ; neither have I no desire for to wet my lips with the gin in this here mug ! ' "

"I don't," said Todminster bluntly. "I haven't! I wouldn't give a little hang for either, upon my word!"

"You are a-burning for 'em, you are a-yearning for 'em, you are a-thusting for 'em, you are a-busting for 'em," said Mr. Piperno. "What takes the edge off your desire for 'em this present moment ? My eye, my will-power, and my moral force ! Turn them three off at the main, and

where are you ? A masterless 'ulk, tossing on the billers of intemperance. Don't tell me you wouldn't give a 'ang for that beer and that gin, for I know better ! Wot was your special poison, then, if they don't appeal to you ?"

"I used—I'm afraid—to put away a good deal of the Boy," owned the pupil ingenuously, "and I was a frightful pegger. Brandy and polly all the time, and vermouth and absinthe as pick-me-ups, besides——"

"I don't know no such drinks as vermouth and habsinthe," said the Professor, "and my belief is you don't neither. Also, if you've put away a boy, you must 'ave done it in a fit of raging drunkenness ! Nothing brings that on, in my experience, like 'ot rum on the top of stout. We'll try you with both them beverages next lesson. For this I do know, young man—there ain't going to be no baeksliding while you're under my eye ! Now you've bin sufficiently strengthened in your self-control for the present, and you may take that bag of uppers down to the shop. Don't you 'ave no bus, 'orse, or motor ; there's plenty of time, and walking's good for you. 'Ullo ! Wot are you a-going to throw that there gin and beer down the sink for ?"

"Only meant to save you trouble," rejoined the pupil. "You always tell me you throw the swipes down the sink when I'm gone." There was an odd twinkle in the eye that met the Professor's.

"Take yourself off, young man," said the great moral suasionist with dignity, "and don't let me 'ave none of your lip ! Leave the filthy liquor on the table—it's no temptation to me ! Your next lesson is at seven p.m."

Todminster obeyed the gesture of the stubby, black-nailed finger that pointed to the baek-door. He threw on his cap, picked up the bag of uppers, and stepped out into the yard. As he did so, the bolts of the kitchen-door were violently shot, and the kitchen blind abruptly deseended.

"Cunning old cock !" said the pupil softly. He put

down the bag of uppers, softly ascended the rain-water butt, and made a long step from that receptacle to the leads covering the back kitchen. A central frame contained a skylight, the thick glass grimy with ancient dirt. Todminster rubbed a clear spot with the cuff of his Salvation guernsey, and peeped in. What he saw he had witnessed before ; but the smile upon his lips betrayed unsatiated enjoyment of the spectacle of the Professor pouring from the gin-mug into the beer-jug, and immediately afterwards taking a long, relishing draught out of the larger receptacle. Todminster longed to startle him with a view-holloa, but he repressed the longing, noiselessly descended from the leads, and betook himself at a stiff pace to the City.

Meanwhile, Anæmia was enjoying the improving society of the lady Scripture-reader—a mild, pleasant-looking person of forty, with plainly-parted hair.

"For I 'aven't seen you for a month of Sundays, Miss Sewings," she said, bringing forward the best chair with evident pleasure. "Well, I declare ! You 'ave been busy all this identical time, haven't you ? Married up North—and to a widow-gentleman-like as might be father ; only with a grown-up son instead of a grown-up daughter. And you won't live at the Hollies, Chiswick, no more, and —please say your new name over again ! 'Sinjones'— 'St. Johnes.' Why, that's what father's last patient's name is, the reformed gentleman-drunkard I've told you about. John Sholto St. Johnes—and if you'd like a glimpse of 'im, 'e's 'aving 'is afternoon course of treatment in the back-kitchen this minute, and I'm sure you're welcome to peep through the crack o' the door."

The Scripture-reading lady—whom the reader will have guessed to be no other than the Duchess of Crags, *née* Sewings—did peep, and immediately recoiled from the door with a suppressed shriek. For in the healthy-looking

young man in the moleskin trousers and Salvation guernsey, who sat under the fire of Professor Piperno's eye, patiently holding at either arm's length a blue mug and a spotted jug with a head on it, she recognized her stepson, the missing prodigal, John Sholto St. Johnes, Marquess of Todminster. One can guess in what a flutter of excitement the good creature stowed her Bible in her little brown leather handbag, and fluttered away to Belgravia in search of the Duke of Crags. Him she found in the throes of gout, Sir Nathaniel Belper in attendance, exciting topics *tabu*. The Duchess settled down beside the bed, effervescent, but dutifully corked.

So the last weeks of the six months went by, and the end of the time of probation loomed very close in sight. Woman had ever been the rock upon which the irrepressible Todminster had split, but in the present instance the rock had afforded a sure refuge from devouring seas. The dissipated peer was in love with the virtuous boot-closer, and the passion that had supported him through five months of the Professor's object-lessons it will be granted must have been genuine. The sardonic humour of having been ostensibly cured of open inebriation by a secret drunkard poked him in the ribs; his gratitude to the drunkard's daughter drowned the twinkle in his eye. After all, Anaemia had done it. Her wholesome dieting, her no less wholesome lectures, the early hours kept, the vigorous exercise taken in company with the bag—these things had whitened the Ethiopian and caused the desert to blossom. Yes, it was Anaemia who had saved him. Would she have the pluck to marry him? he asked himself, and asked himself so often that one day he asked her.

"How did you ever come to like me so?" she cried joyfully, the grey eyes dilating, until they seemed to fill her sweet, blushing face. "No! I wouldn't be afraid—not with such a man as father ever near."

"But without Mr. Piperno——" hinted Todminster.

"Oh, you wouldn't—you couldn't go back?" she cried. "Not to what you were when I see you first and pitied over you, a wondering, 'Was there no woman ever loved you enough to keep you straight?'"

"There was never one but you, my dear!" said Todminster, slipping the arm in the scarlet guernsey round her waist—a slender and pretty waist, if corseted at one-and-eleven-three. He remembered the Delosme and others of her kind, and mentally gnashed his teeth at his own thrice-besotted idiocy. "And yet, if I hadn't jumped the track of respectability," he reflected, "I shouldn't have met this blessed little soul. We'll let it go at that!" And he put remorse manfully away as he kissed the blessed little soul.

"The six months is up to-morrow, dear," said Anæmia presently, "and you'll go back to the old shop and ask your governor to take you on again, if you're wise."

"My governor! . . . the old shop . . . take me on!" Todminster repeated blankly. Then his face lighted up. He laughed, understanding. "Yes, little woman, I'll go back, but the shop isn't quite the kind you mean—or the governor. I should rather like to see the governor again, poor old man. He did a rash thing six months ago—got married again! I wonder how it has agreed with him?"

"If he's got a second as good as our Scripture-reader lady," said the loyal Anæmia, "he's done well for hisself. She've not bin' near me lately—sent a letter-card with a West-end postmark to say her dear husband was suffering sadly from an inflammatory attack, and her place could only be by his side." She rose from her chair with a joyful exclamation, hurriedly unwinding the sleeve of the Salvation guernsey from her pretty waist. "How odd!" she cried. "Talk of angels! . . . Our Scripture-reader's just passed by the window with such a nice, clean old gentleman

—her husband, I expect. And hark ! that's her knock at the door.” She gleefully tripped into the close little passage, she opened the hall door, and ushered her visitors into the front kitchen. “ Walk in, Miss Sewings, please, ma'am. Walk in, sir, you're kindly weleome both. There's nobody here but ”—she blushed beautifully, indicating to the Duke and Duchess of Crags the brand from the burning in the red Salvation guernsey—“ but my young man.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“ Sueh is gratitood !” complained Professor Piperno some weeks after to a select circle of Hammersmith admirers. “ Serpents' teeth and crocodiles' tears. To me, the man to 'oom everythink is owed, a measly twenty poun' note. To him and her, Markis and Markiness of Todminster, 'undreds an' 'undreds of acres of sheep-grazin' in Victoria, Noo South Wales, a 'ouse, stock-farm, and two thousand pounds per ann., until the old 'un drops off the perch and lets 'im in for millions. Him, that young aristocrat what I reformed of 'is 'igh-bred 'abits!—him no more able to do without my guidin' 'and an' savin' influence than a noo-born babe! Why, a ostrich might as safely go a-walking in a thunderstorm after a full meal of pocket-knives as that young man—my son-in-law—venture among the temptations of the world without me by 'is side!” He shook his head prophetically and—he had been giving a lesson in self-control to a new pupil that afternoon—shed a few tears. “ But they'll send for me before long,” he said. “ They'll send for me, and I'm not the man for to desert my own flesh and blood in trouble—I shall go!”

It is worthy of record that, although several years have passed since the shrill society scandal caused by the extraordinary *mesalliance* of the Marquess of Todminster with a young person of the working classes, and the subsequent emigration of the couple in question, Mr. Piperno has not yet been sent for.

## XIX

### WHITE FOX

IT is historically recorded how an aged Imperial Dowager, snapping sparks from the bright brown eyes that once adorned the comely countenance of a Cantonese slave-girl, dragged the hem of her sacred yellow brocade robe from the despairing clutch of the Lord of Ten Thousand Years, the Son of Heaven, Master and Ruler of China (and what else goes to make up the world), by the express appointment of the gods in council ; and, with a petulant movement of an undeformed foot, kicked over the beehive of Europe and waked snakes in the United States. Consequently, within a very short time, the Gulf of Pechili was adorned, studded—even as a dish of trifle with ratafias and macaroons—by the battleships, transports, armoured cruisers, and destroyers of six indignant Powers, round which little black, active torpedo-boats played like a school of porpoises, while the turtle-backs of three submarines showed, rolling among the crisp blue jobbling wavelets like lazy, basking whales.

Peking was in the hands of the Allies ; the Emperor, the Dowager Empress, and all the chief officials had fled to Tai-yuen-fu, in the West, the spirited old lady having beheaded, at the very last moment, three Ministers who advised her to make terms. The Imperial City, swept clean of Chinese by the broom of Count Von Waldersee, hummed with men of every other race and colour known upon the face of the earth ; and, while a representative force marched through the Purple Forbidden City playing half-

a-dozen different national anthems at once, international sentries were posted in the Imperial palaces to prevent looting. The palaces of the Mandarins, chief eunuchs, and Imperial Court favourites were thoughtfully overlooked.

James Anstruther Winnington, Musketry Lieutenant of the second-class armoured cruiser *Tornado*, sent up from Tientsin with a junior, a couple of midshipmen, and a force of sixty bluejackets dragging a gun, to aid in the maintenance of good order and the preservation of the propriety dear to the British Navy, came at a rapid slinging trot over one of the marble bridges that cross the moat separating Prospect Hill, with its Buddhist temples, from the Forbidden City. The yellow manure-dust of the City outside had clotted with the sweat upon James Anstruther Winnington and his men, so that their white drill had assumed a khaki shade. They were bloodstained, for in the preservation of order the fighting had been lively ; and James Anstruther Winnington had lost the peak of his cap and a slice of his eyebrow, from a slashing sabre-cut administered by a frenzied trooper of an Indian Cavalry Regiment, mad with arrack and the loot-fever both.

“Pretty, pretty!” said Winnington to his junior, as a roaring torrent of human sewage rolled in and out of the gateways of the marble palaces, and the shrieks of women pierced the hubbub. “See those French artillery-men and bluejackets in the thick of it, and the Russians making hay while the sun shines ; they’re throwing the furniture and china into the courtyards from the galleries because they can’t carry it away ! Lord, if my mother at home in Deershire only saw the dragon-ware going smash, she’d die of pure horror ! Hullo, who’s this prancing lunatic in the gilt bedgown ? Get back there, you beggar, or I’ll jab you in the ribs ! Get back ! d’ye hear ?”

" Make way for me, for Hi ham the Hemperor of Chiny !" howled a hoarse voice out of a frothing mouth. " Bow down, you perishin' Navy swine, before the Himperial Kwang Shu ! You cocoa-swillin', preserved spud-eatin', deck-scrapin' son of a condemned Belleville biler an' a vertical triple-expansion-engine, it's as much as your crimson life is worth to lay a finger on me ! Bow down while Hi gits into me Imperial state chariot, for Hi ham the Anointed of the Lord !"

He who frothed and threatened was a stalwart man of thirty, with bloodshot eyes, an inflamed countenance, and a red moustache, clotted as if with shaving-soap. On his head was a filigree silver-gilt flower-pot, fixed upside down, and his tall figure was clothed in the resplendent silken folds of a gold-embroidered Mandarin's robe lined with rich, snowy, glistening fur. He brandished in one powerful hand a wicker-covered glass flask of native spirit ; and in the other a bottle with the foil of Martell ; and from the bosom of the robe he wore projected the neck of another bottle. Never was there a more wildly drunken private than this raving creature who tried to force his way through the dusty, blood-stained ranks of the grinning bluejackets in order to mount upon the gun.

" He's one of the Royal Deershires, sir," said Winnington's sub-lieutenant close behind his ear. " The Second Battalion has been sent up from Hong Kong, you know !"

The resplendent dressing-gown, open at the breast, showed a Regimental number on the man's Service khaki, and an indicative scrap of colour. Winnington was a Deershire man, and though this Cockney drunkard was none ; still, a Winnington had led the regiment into action at Abu Klea, and left his brave bones in a shallow grave under the mud-baked walls of Metemneh.

" Wants to ride the gun, does he ?" said Winnington, grimly. " Put him up then, and spreadeagle him with

a spare lashing. You've got to travel with us now, you taut-skinned, fiery-eyed lunatic, whether you like it or not!" he added, as the grinning *Tornados* obeyed. "We'll hand him over to the Deershires later on!" And the gun-team, and the gun, and the man on the gun went up-hill at the double.

"Drunk and lootin'," said the senior Captain of the detachment of Royal Deershires that had been sent to relieve the exhausted garrison of the British Legation, when No. 645, Company F., was obligingly returned to him some hours later, by a deferential petty-officer of H.M.S. *Tornado* and six obsequiously smiling gunner seamen.

"Gad! if his tunic was stuffed with jewellery it wouldn't be fair to stick the poor beast in cells (if I had any cells to put him in), not while the Allied Army stops outside 'em! But my thanks to Mr. Winnington all the same. I'll send him back the next balmy bluejaeket of his I stumble across, say, with my compliments."

"Kiss me, mother, ere I die," sang the offender, who had lapsed into the melodiously-maudlin stage. The silver-gilt flower-pot had vanished from his brow, but the majesty of the dressing-gown still clothed him. "I was the Hemperor of Chiny, but them crimson thieves o' sailormen 'as stole me crown, an' I've got a cold in me 'ead for want of it!"

"He's raving, sir," said the petty-officer anxiously.

"Ravin' be jiggered, you duff-fed burglar!" said the drunken private in the gorgeous robe. Then he began to slip from the willing hands that held him until he lay upon the marble pavement of the Legation courtyard. "Rest, rest for the weary!" he sang. "But 'ow can a man rest with pains in 'is bones like them what I 'ave? From 'ead to foot I'm a livin' toothache, Gawd 'elp me! Oo-owh!"

He groaned, and wallowed on the marble squares. The petty-officer saluted and departed with his men. A half-caste Mongol Turcoman, half valet, half interpreter, who had remained in the Embassy throughout the siege, had moved up noiselessly, and stood looking down upon the writhing No. 645 with an inscrutable smile on his yellow face. Then he pointed to the elaborate golden embroideries upon the gorgeous Mandarin's robe with a slender yellow finger.

"He will go on aching, tell him—the English Tommee—while he goes on wearing *that!* Those sailors would have stolen it, like the other things he speaks of, if somebody had not interpreted to them what is written *there.*"

"Rot!" said a young subaltern of the Royal Deersires rather rudely, "tell that to the Marines."

"There are more things in heaven and—elsewhere, Gregory," said the Captain in command of the Legation garrison, whose name was Graymere, "than they taught fellows like you at Rugby and Sandhurst. Tell us what it is about this robe, Chan Mirz, that causes this man now wearing it to be in pain?"

Chan Mirz looked past the Captain with narrow, unwinking eyes. The man on the pavement began to cry out that rats were eating his vitals.

"It is not rats," said Chan Mirz. "What it is is written *there*"—and again the thin, delicate, yellow finger, tipped by the long, narrow nail, that ended a full inch beyond it, pointed at the golden Chinese characters thickly embroidered on the wonderful silk of shot and mingled mother-of-pearl, grey, and powder-blue.

"Read for us, Chan Mirz!" said the Captain.

Chan Mirz read something like this :

"Hear, O Kwan-Ti! May the unscrupulous appropriator of this robe of honour, gloriously bestowed by the Imperial Light of Palaces, the sole mistress of the world,

the Empress Tsu-Shi, upon the faithful slave Ho-Fung, Priest of the Taoist Temple, constantly feel in his depraved marrow and sinful liver the avenging tooth of the White Fox ! May he never become the Guest of the Gemmeous Hall and drink tea with the Thousand Ancestors ! May the dead decline his offerings ! May his son never warm his bed ! May he lie like a corpse before death ! May slumber shun his eyelids ! Hear, O Kwan-Ti ! Yet, if he repent and restore this robe to the defrauded, or sell it to the blameless for five pieces of gold, or one piece, the tooth of the White Fox shall cease to gnaw him, nor shall the purchaser suffer. Hear, O Kwan-Ti, hear !"

"The garment is lined with white fox, as your Excellency sees," said Chan Mirz smoothly, "and the white fox, according to the belief of my—of the Chinese people, is a god—or a devil."

"Shall I order the robe to be taken from him ?" said the Captain, twirling his moustache.

"I think to *take* it away would not be wise," said Chan Mirz, "for the teeth of White Fox make no distinction between thief and thief. Let not your Excellency be angry." He joined his palms, and bowed under the Captain's stern, indignant glance. "Buy the garment of him for gold, and doubtless his pains will pass away."

The Captain turned on his heel and beckoned to the battalion Serjeant-Major. A row of cotton mattresses on the floor of a Legation bath-house did duty for a field-hospital. Here they dumped down No. 645, Company F., gave him a dose prescribed by the doctor, who said it was a case of alcohol-poisoning complicated by rheumatic gout, and left him. His tortured ravings kept the other patients awake all night, but when they argued he grew homicidal, and it was found necessary to sit upon him in relays, until the morning, when his collapsed condition rendered it necessary that the Chaplain should be sent for.

"I am sorry to trouble you in the midst of the arduous duties devolving upon you," said the Chaplain to the Captain, "but Jones, No. 645, Company F., has in all human probability but an hour or two to live, and as my efforts to get him into a frame of mind suitable to—arah!—his present condition have—arah!—proved unavailing, I should be grateful if your authority could achieve what my exhortations have failed to—arah!—accomplish."

The Captain stood by the native mattress and looked down at a blue-white face and a figure twisted as if by strychnine-throes. Over the coverlet the white-fox lined robe of honour had been spread, and claw-like fingers picked at the thick gold embroideries. An impromptu screen divided the pallet of the moribund from the next one, and a hospital orderly resigned his place on an upturned tinned-vegetable case to the commanding officer.

"Look here, Jones!" said the Captain, "I'm a bad hand at preaching, y'know, but hadn't you better hear what the Chaplain has got to say? It's what we must all come to, don't you see? Though I'm afraid we think about it as little as we can." It was odd how he shied at the grim word "death." "And if there is any message you'd like to have sent to your relations——"

"Got none!" said No. 645, with an effort that sent a wave of greenish-white over the clammy face.

"Or any directions you wish to give me with regard to the disposal of your property . . ."

"Got none!" gasped No. 645. "Got nothin' but a bloomin' rotten Service-kit an' a blighted bad character . . . an' *this!*!"

"This! . . ." The Captain looked at the white fox robe, and remembered the words of Chan Mirz. If he bought the garment for five pieces of gold, or one piece, would it save the man now, at the eleventh hour?

"Speak to him about his immortal soul," said the Chaplain's eye. The Captain floundered, and blurted out :

"Look here, Jones, do you want to sell that fur-lined Mandarin's dressing-gown ? Because, if you do . . . I'll give you five pounds for the thing. Think"—he glanced guiltily at the Chaplain—"think how thundering—ahem ! —drunk you could get on five pounds!"

"Done with you, sir!" gasped the rapidly dissolving Jones. The Captain pulled out a worn little leather money-pouch and told five honest British sovereigns—nearly all the money it contained—into the claw-like hand that clutched them.

Then he lifted the white fox robe from the sick man's pallet. The form beneath lay strangely still.

"Heaven forgive you, Captain Graymere, the man is dead !" said the Chaplain. " You sent the miserable sinner before his Maker, sir, with a sordid bargain in his mouth instead of a prayer for mercy. And it is my duty to tell you, as a clergyman, you will answer for this at the Last Day !" As he pointed to the defunct, Jones of Company F. opened his eyes. Then he yawned and sat up, a British private, sound in wind and limb, free from aches and pains, possessed of five golden sovereigns, and an abiding desire to expend the same in drink, if liquor could not be obtained by means less lawful. And the Chaplain shook the dust of the temporary hospital from the soles of his boots, and departed, and the Captain went back to his quarters carrying the Mandarin's robe of white fox fur, and, rolling it up, thrust it into a canvas kit-sack, and forgot it thenceforward utterly.

The Second Battalion of the Deershire Regiment came back from China in due course, and inhabited the Barracks at Devonpool, vacated in their favour by the First Battalion, which cheered them from the troop-deck of

H.M.S. *Jubbeh*, *en route* for Hong Kong, even as they steamed into the Straits of Gibraltar, homeward bound. At Plymouth Dockyard the Captain found Mrs. Graymere waiting, and thenceforward reassumed the duties, privileges, and responsibilities of a married man. These having only been taken on six months previously to the departure of the Deershires for the East, were new enough to be welcomed joyously.

"No use hunting through the baggage, pet ; you won't find anything except those Canton carvings and the vases. Soldiers musn't loot nowadays, or I might have . . . but no matter ! Yes, some of the men have got astonishing things stowed away possibly ; but I can't take official cognisance of an offence until it's formally brought to my notice. No, the newspapers didn't exaggerate. There were jars of silver dollars behind the gin-eases in the godowns, and houses full of laequer ware and brocades and dragon-ware and crackle porelain. As for the jewellery . . . it looks more valuable than it is, owing to a rotten habit the native jewellers have of cutting up diamonds into thin slices. . . . Bad or not, you could have done with a little of it, perhaps ; and if I could have got some for you honestly . . . What have you got there ? Of course, I remember the thing ! . . . a Mandarin's robe I bought from a man who was dying. Yes, it is uncommonly handsome, with all those gold embroideries, and lined, as you see, with white fox fur. I gave the poor devil five pounds for it—more than it's worth, possibly, but then——"

"Oh, Ted, white fox, *real* white fox from North China, is worth its weight in gold !" gasped Mrs. Graymere. She insinuated her slim, *svelte* figure into the gold-embroidered shimmering silks, shuddering deliciously as the deep, thick, snowy furs enfolded her, and the rich, strange odours of Oriental perfumes wooed her little pink nostrils. "I saw a *cape* of white fox at the Regent-street Fur Mart, and

they wanted three hundred pounds for it. This must be worth a thousand ! Oh, Ted !”

She came to Ted, and sat coaxingly upon his knee. She kissed his sunburnt brow, and the thin spot on the top of his martial head, and the tip of his nose, his best feature, and twirled the ends of his moustache until the tears came into his eyes. All these attentions, she said, her Ted deserved for bringing such a lovely present to his darling little wife. Under the Delilah-like caresses Ted found his principles crumbling fast ; it was necessary to be assertive, even brutal in the cause of righteousness.

“ My dear Ethelind——”

“ Do call me Linda !” begged Mrs. Graymere. “ You only say Ethelinda when you’re grumpy.”

“ How could I be grumpy to you, darling, when we haven’t yet been together for twenty-four hours ?” said Mrs. Graymere’s Ted. “ But, you see, I can’t give you what is not, strictly speaking, mine. Soldiers were not so serupulous in the old days as they are expected to be now, and my great-grandfather, the old General, who was at the taking of Seringapatam, would have laughed me to scorn, I don’t doubt, if he had heard me talk like this. He brought home an emerald agraffe that had belonged to Tippoo Sahib, and a filagree scent-bottle studded with rubies that——”

“ It’s too late to say I wish I had married your great-grandfather instead of you !” said Mrs. Graymere, pettishly.

“ And it’s still early enough to say I won’t give you that white fox robe, at least until I have had advice upon the subject, and found out whether I may decently keep it !” said the Captain.

“ Say nothing about it, for Heaven’s sake !” screamed little Mrs. Graymere, falling on Ted’s neck. “ And, if you won’t give it to me, you needn’t bother. *I shall steal it !*”

She got off her Ted's knee with a decided air, and began to pirouette before the long pier-glass of their hotel bedroom. The morning sunshine played on her shining hair-waves and bathed the white neck and the undulating, supple arms that she poised above her head, in golden radiance. Her slipper flew from her dainty foot as she executed a *pas-seul*, and the enraptured Teddy retrieved it and knelt to replace it. Then the laughing, flushed face above him was changed, and paled ; and the grey eyes were contracted with sudden pain.

"Oh, Ted ! Oh, Ted ! Don't touch me ! . . . Horrible, like a knife going through—just here. Ah-h ! There's another. What horrid thing is the matter with me ? Like what I've read of . . . rats gnawing prisoners' bones while they're alive. Oh, Ted, help me !"

Ted did what he could, his brain whirling, and broke the electric bell in ringing for the chamber-maid. When the hastily-summoned doctor arrived he could do no good. His sedatives were like oil upon the flame of little Mrs. Graymere's agonies. At last, when her husband stood by the bedside and looked down upon a grey-blue, livid face, and saw pinched, wandering fingers picking at the gold embroideries of the white fox robe, tardy relief came.

For the Captain remembered Peking, and Jones of Company F., and Chan Mirz, the half-caste, who had interpreted the gold-embroidered letters. And he dragged forth his sovereign-case and tore out a yellow coin, and crammed it fiercely into one of his wife's wandering hands, and cried :

"Quick, Linda, darling ! quick, for your own sake ! Say you'll sell me the white fox robe for a sovereign. I—I'm not joking, dear, it's earnest—terrible earnest!"

"How . . . can you be . . . so silly ?" said little Mrs. Graymere, in a thready whisper. He leaned close to the

grey face upon the pillow, and told the Peking story in gasps. She shut her eyes and faintly shook her head.

"No . . . you'd take it away, and it is so beautiful. . . ."

Her weak voice broke upon the wail. There was infinite hunger for possession in the dilated eyes.

"But you'll die—my own, my beloved!" pleaded poor Graymere desperately. At that the grey grew greyer, but she shut his wretched face out with her dropped eyelids, and would not answer again.

There came a knock at the bedroom-door. The distracted husband answered it blindly. A regimental orderly from the Barracks stood waiting in the corridor, a yellow official envelope marked "Urgent" in his hand. The man was in full-dress with side-arms, and the Captain, with an unspeakable lifting of the heart, recognized Private Jones, of Company F., as he saluted.

"From the Adjutant, sir, marked 'Himmediate,'" began Private Jones. Graymere caught him by the shoulder and dragged him into the sick-room. He showed him that face upon the pillow. He told him of the curse translated by Chan Mirz, and begged the man, for pity's sake, to help the saviour of his own life in this desperate extremity.

"She won't part with that 'ere dressin' - gownd, not if she 'as to die for it." Private Jones's tobacco-stained teeth showed in a grin. "'Eavens ! Ain't she pluck ! I sold it for money to buy liquor ; but dress is wimmin's drink. 'Ave you the yellow-bird 'andy, sir ?'

He took the piece of money, and tossed it in his coarse palm as he unhitched the bayonet from his Sam Browne belt, and stepped lightly to the bedside. "We'll 'ave on the 'lectries for this 'ere gallantry-show if you've no objection, sir," he said with another grin, "and best for you to keep out o' sight ! She's got to be frightened into doin' wot she 'as to do, an' the sight o' steel and the thought

o' blood is wot'll do the trick with 'er ! Stand back, she's openin' her eyes. . . ."

A drop of blood on the point of the glittering steel, just a tiny puncture at the base of the white throat. . . . Then, with hate glittering in her hollow eyes, little Mrs. Graymere gasped out the words that transferred the stolen white fox robe to the soldier, who had unaccountably appeared from nowhere and threatened to murder her if she did not sell it to him for the ridiculously inadequate sum of a sovereign. All the time she believed herself to be delirious, but the apparition of this savage man in khaki, with the horrible, needle-pointed, triangular weapon, was not to be endured. She took the sovereign he thrust upon her, believing it to be a dream-coin—no more real than the hand that gave it. Then the ghastly pains ceased, and she fell into a blessed sleep.

"Go now before I kill you!" said the Captain hoarsely to Jones of Company F., "and take this cursed thing with you." He pointed to the white fox robe, and Jones of Company F. obeyed.

The sunshine of another morning was gilding the edges of the blinds when little Mrs. Graymere awakened. Her Ted's face was bending over her, strangely haggard and drawn. And she had forgotten the white fox robe and the events of yesterday, which was for her as though it had never been.

"Good patience ! my dear boy, you're up and dressed already. . . . I must have slept like the Seven Thingumbobs. Don't tell me if I snored ! I feel as fresh as a daisy, anyhow, and you . . ." With the tip of her finger she touched her husband's chin, upon which an unmistakable growth of bristles marked the lapse of time. "Gracious ! you've forgotten to shave. Go and do it at once !" she ordered, and he kissed her and went obediently. "I've had the most awful, extraordinary, *realish* dream,"

she called after him, "but you can't hear it until after breakfast, because to tell a dream fasting means that it will come true! . . ."

"All right, dear! . . . all right!" said the Captain nervously. At breakfast she appeared at her brightest in a lovely new blouse, cut just a little square. And in the hollow at the base of the white throat, showing between the coils of a thin gold chain, there was a tiny crimson speck. She felt his eyes upon it, and put up her hand.

"Dreams are such odd things," she said. "Mine was about a soldier, who stood over me as I lay in bed, with a drawn bayonet. I even felt the point of it touch my throat; and, do you know"—she put up her hand to the place—"there is actually a tiny mark there this morning. I must have scratched it with a brooch-pin." Ted knew better, but he did not say so. For ever, his lips were sealed. . . .

## XX

### REALIZATION

THEY were engaged at last—had reached the long-desired goal of open betrothal, after an unusually rough course, even for true lovers. Parents on one side, guardians upon the other, had objected to the disposal, on the part of these rather mature young people, of their own affections! A jealous suitor of Lady Laura's had carried out a little plot for making things difficult for the Senior Lieutenant, and a green-eyed lady—who, of course, should have known better, being married to the Lieutenant's commanding officer—had got her late admirer into double-extra hot water, while Fortune and Fate had contrived to pile obstacles in the path. Thus the Lieutenant had invested a considerable portion of his capital—"just large enough, considered as capital, to make a man feel himself a pauper," to quote its owner—in South African mining shares only partially covered, before the war broke out. And one of the trustees on Lady Laura's side, a grave, middle-aged, and virtuous legal widower, with a sensitive conscience, a reputation for philanthropy, and a small family, had proved the existence of an unsuspected code of romance in his singularly commonplace individuality by realizing a passion for a fascinating serio-comic singer together with a considerable amount of cash from stock belonging to his clients, and departing into dim conjectural regions, beyond the reach of Scotland Yard, with the beauty and the bullion.

And now the breakers were passed, the lovers' battered

boat had glided safely to the sunny sands of Certainty. No more suspense—all sureness. No more amatory plotting—everything plain! No more dropping of furtive letters into alien post-office slits ; no more hasty, heavenly assignations in Aerated Bread shops and picture-galleries ; no more primitive sign-correspondence, as in the days of Early Man ; no more clandestine kissing in corners ; no more hidden hand-squeezing ; no more of the things that had made the courtship—prolonged over a period of years—delightful. Lady Laura and the Senior Lieutenant were henceforward to find plain sailing for the yacht of their affections. The Lieutenant had, through the deaths—sudden and unexpected—of about six relatives with whom he had been upon the merest hand-shaking terms, come into a considerable amount of money and a title. Not much of a title—only a baronetey of the Trafalgar year—but sufficient to save Lady Laura, who was the only daughter of an impoverished peer, from the reproach of having married a mister. And her relatives in consequence had magnanimously extended the happy hand to the Senior Lieutenant. Add to this that the jealous suitor, who had made mischief, was now married to a Scotch toffee-maker's widow—add to that that the green-eyed married lady, whose jealousy had embroiled the Senior Lieutenant, was now properly divorced and had entered an Anglican Sisterhood, the habit of which was unusually becoming, under the religious title of Sister Amiea of the Angels—and draw from the premises the conclusion that Lady Laura and the Senior Lieutenant were in the seventh heaven of happiness.

Conclusions, I warn you, are not always correct. When a vivid interest has been shorn from life, life afterwards is apt to fall exceedingly flat. When to the raptures of righteous affection of the kind whose Cupid-bow is strung with legal red tape, and whose roses seek nothing better

than to bloom under the auspices of the Church, are added the joys of intrigue ; the mixture, as a sauce to the cold mutton of existence, beats ketchup or picallili. And Lady Laura and the Lieutenant, who was going to retire on his brevet in a month or so, had got used to sauce. Their palates required the stimulant.

To-day, for the first time for years, the Lieutenant had not received at his Jermyn Street chambers a little note in Lady Laura's handwriting containing the countersign for the day.

"Dearest," it used to begin, "I am to be dragged by Constantia to McNaughten's to look at enamels 12 p.m. We lunch at Prince's 1.30, do a *matinée* at the *Such-and-Such* 2.30, and drink our four o'clock at a quarter to six in the outer room at the Tea Hole, Exel Street, Regent Street. If my own dear cared to steal a little peep at his poor Lollie ! Ever my own's—L."

And unless regimental duties seriously interfered, the Senior Lieutenant would drop in at several of these places, to his Lollie's blushingly conscious rapture and Constantia's high-nosed, double-chinned disgust. Constantia would not have dreamed of scowling at him now ; the terrors of her nose, the awe-inspiring influences of her chin, were things of the past to Senior Lieutenant Sir Peter Felpaugh of the King's Own Lifers. He was to lunch at Hanover Square to-day—with Laura. He was to go out shopping—with Laura ; attend a *matinée*—with Laura, and take her to the Tea Hole afterwards ! He was thirty-three, and Laura, was, of course, much less than that, though not so very far behind him.

He was a slight man, with bright, wistful brown eyes, a long straight moustache, a big head and a bigger heart. Laura was primrose-coloured as to her hair, and grey as to her eyes, with a complexion of the fashionable mauve. He had never known until this morning, when his *fiancée*

received him in the vast, solemn drawing-room at Hanover Square, that Laura was no longer a girl. Laura had never observed that Peter's head was too big for his slight, weedy body until now. There was the remembrance of that slight but unpleasant shock of discovery between them as they went down to luncheon. Laura's mother was there ; a sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued, little old lady, who had planted many a thorn in Sir Peter's amatory path. She greeted him now with effusion, and remembered that he liked cayenne with his soup ! Laura sat opposite ; there was no need to exchange furtive glances, no necessity to resort to the secret masonry of the boot-toe and slipper-tip. Before the cutlets Constantia came bustling in. She was all smiles as she gave her hand to Sir Peter. He could have had both of them if he had been greedy, he knew.

"Laura and Sir Peter have planned a long day together," Laura's mother said, so benevolently.

"*How nice for you both!*" cried Constantia, with beaming geniality. "By the way," she added, focussing her smile on Sir Peter, "Mallison sent you his best congratulations. He wants to know if you would care for a couple of his Clumber spaniels ? If so, he would send you a pair of yearling puppies from Binksleigh."

Sir Peter muttered something, conscious as he was that Mallison—Constantia's husband—had invariably, for several years past, looked the other way when they met, and referred to him behind his back, and more than once before his face, as "*that fellow !*" Laura's light grey eyes opened wide—rather with pain than pleasure, it seemed to Peter. Before luncheon was quite over Peggy Prideaux, Laura's bosom friend and ally all through the stormy period of Laura's courtship, bounced in. Peggy was an untidy, emotional, middle-aged girl, whom Peter had found invaluable as a post-office and message-repository. En-

haloed with indispensability, Peggy had of yore appeared quite lovely in Peter's view. To-day she seemed old, unattractive, and an emotional bore. Her unpretty eyes, of the beady-brown description, kept filling with joyful tears as she regarded her idol Laura on the pinnacle of happiness ; and Peter, as acknowledged owner of the idol, found himself regarding it in a calmer and more critical spirit than he could have wished. After luncheon Laura and Peter found themselves alone together in the large, yellow - brocaded, sandalwood - smelling drawing-room.

"Aren't you coming, Constantia ?" Laura had said to her sister-in-law, almost with an accent of appeal.

"No, dear ! You will get on very well without me, I dare say," Constantia had replied with ponderous archness. Who had ever seen Constantia arch before ?

"Aren't *you* coming ?" Peter whispered, in an alarmed kind of way, as Peggy held out her hand to him. He quite held on to the hand in his anxiety.

"No, dear Sir Peter," Peggy whispered back, with the damp eyelids and the reddened nose of the emotional rejoicer. "I wouldn't spoil it—your *first*—for the world !" And she nodded and becked from the hall, as Peter went wearily upstairs in his Laura's wake, wondering why the dickens he was not as happy as he had expected ?

Soon he found himself sitting on the edge of a large, cold, springy sofa at the bleak end of the yellow drawing-room, while Laura regarded him from a rocking-chair near the fire. There was a little high-backed William and Mary settee—a kind of armchair, big enough to hold two people who preferred sitting in one another's pockets. It stood, empty, within a comfortable distance of the hearthrug. Times out of number had Laura dreamed of sitting in that settee with Peter ; upon scores of occasions had Peter intrigued to sit in it with Laura, and failed,

owing to the unhallowed acumen of Laura's relations, the frightful vigilance of Laura's friends, with the sole exception of the sentimental Peggy. Peter, you see, could call Peggy "sentimental" now. And the time had come, the opportunity had arrived, and neither Peter nor Laura availed themselves of it.

There was a long, frigid pause. Laura lay back in the rocking-chair. She had eaten a very good lunch, much to her own surprise, for with an accepted, acknowledged Peter opposite she had felt that soup would be supererogatory, and cutlets out of the question. She glanced at Peter, and his head seemed unusually large. She spoke, in a still small voice, of some subject of tepid interest which had been threshed out in the newspapers for days.

Peter feebly dashed into the subject. He had dallied with it for some little time, when he observed Laura's features agitated by a slight convulsion. Poor Laura ! Was she disappointed at his neglecting to avail himself of the amatory opportunities so lavishly scattered in his path ? He looked timidly in the direction of the double settee, then back at his betrothed. Ah ! she was yawning ! yawning lavishly and unrestrainedly behind her sheltering palm. The infection seized upon Peter, and Peter yawned too.

"Catching, isn't it ?" Laura said, and tittered. There had always been melody in those little laughs of hers before to-day. But Peter was grateful for the titter. It broke the ice, and he got up and went over and stood upon the hearthrug, quite like a husband, his back to the fire, and his brown eyes considering his beloved.

"Well, dear, we've got through !" he said, in the tone a husband might have used in referring to the crush in the Haymarket vestibule on the first night of a new play.

"Yes," agreed Laura, "we've got through!"

There was a perceptible lack of enthusiasm in her tone,

and her light grey eyes looked vaguely tearful. Peter had another shot.

"I never expected we should do it. It has been uphill work ! collar all the way !" He pulled his moustache, and it seemed to him that he had not said the psychologically-appropriate thing.

"We have waited—an awfully long time !" Laura returned, with a slight accent of wonder that seemed to add : "Why, if for this ?"

"They were all," said Sir Peter, carefully feeling his moustache, "so much against the match, weren't they ?"

"I used to think them so unreasonable and so cruel," Laura said, rather as if she had changed her opinion.

"I was poor, of course !" Peter observed.

"If you think my relations were actuated by no motives other than mercenary ones," retorted Laura sharply, "you do them an injustice !" She had never stood up for her relations before, Peter being invariably the allowance-maker and excuser. "I cannot stand by——"

"Sit by," corrected Peter, pettishly adding : "Why are women so loose and inaccurate in their statements ?" Never had he numbered Laura with the concrete mass of her sex before. Never had he condemned her by action, judged her even by a look.

Laura felt it. Her nose wrinkled in the preparatory spasm incidental to tears. Peter wished it wouldn't. She produced a little foolish handerchief, more adapted in size to the tiny provoking *nez retroussé* of the heroine of a society novel than a prominent organ of the Roman style of architecture. She had cried *about* Peter and *for* Peter on and off, turn about, for years. Now Peter had made her cry ! She was dismally conscious of a change. She achieved the first choking gulp, dropped the first tear, and then Peter came over to her side.

"My dear Laura, what is there to cry about ? Are

you wounded because I said that women, as a rule, are inaccurate in their speech?"

He bent over Laura with a caressing manner, not untinged with patronage, and kissed her hand. As he did so the eye of Laura fastened on the thin place in his hair, right on the crown, the sensitive spot of man advancing to middle-age. Also she noted grey hairs in his moustache and crow's-feet in the corners of his eyes. She had previously grasped the fact that Peter's head was too large. Now she realized, as Peter released her hand and walked back to his old place upon the hearthrug, that his legs were weedy, would always be, and had always been so, and might become weedier yet in years to come. . . . Suddenly composed, she rose, and, glancing at her watch, asked him to look at the *Lady's Dictatorial* for ten seconds while she put on her hat. . . . She was half-an-hour putting on that hat, while Peter chafed in the yellow drawing-room. He was pacing up and down the hall when she descended, fully arrayed.

It was too late to do any shopping before going to the theatre to see *The Coster Girl*, so Laura only looked in at a shoemaker's in Wigmore Street and a milliner's in Old Bond Street, and gave some directions at her tailor's about the braiding of a white cloth cape. It was a very particular cape—the going-away cape, in fact; for Laura had already begun to order her wedding garments, and much time was taken up by it, while Peter kicked his heels upon monogrammed mats, and inwardly said things beginning, "Why are women—" or "Why do women—" or "How women can—" They were all in his face when he saw Laura again, and she read them there, but had no inclination to cry. You can't, you know, with a spangled veil on: the spangles are only glued!

"We shall miss half the first act of *The Coster Girl*.

Taxi!" shouted Peter, hailing a smart machine with his stick. Now, for reasons dimly connected with a desire for amatory privacy, Peter and Laura had hitherto patronized four-wheelers. And at the instant of Peter's hailing the taxi, Laura had signalled with her umbrella to the red-nosed driver of a venerable cab. Result, that both equipages collided at the kerb, and Peter found his temper again endangered.

"Do you really prefer this thing? . . . Of course, if you think we have time to spare! . . ." He paid off the driver of the smart taxi, and resignedly assisted Laura into the reposeful relic, once presumably a brougham, whose depressed steed glanced round his blinker in a protesting way, as though exclaiming: "Two of 'em! And only a shilling fare!"

And they trundled away to the Jollity Theatre. All the way, though Laura uttered nothings aloud, she was saying somethings, inwardly, about men. "Just like all men!" or "So like a man!" or "Did I ever dream he was that kind of man?" ending up: "If I had dreamed he was that kind of man—" And all the things she mentally said were stereotyped in her face, and Peter sat on the rickety front seat and wondered why he had suddenly discovered it wasn't a face worth dying for!

*The Coster Girl* had progressed nearly to the end of the first act when Peter and his betrothed made their progress, over rows of throbbing toes, to the centre of the stalls. Laura swept a *matinée* hat from its moorings, while Peter fell over an umbrella, and was called an upstart by an irascible old lady whose proportions prohibited the idea of passing her. At last Peter and his beloved settled down, but it was only just as the act-drop did; and Peter found himself yawning again as he realized that there were ten minutes to spend before the curtain went up again. Formerly, if placed next to Laura, he would have hailed

the prospect with rapture. Formerly, how passionately he had inclined to the Lyceum school of drama, with its long waits, its pauses of shadow, its orchestrated intervals of utter darkness, favourable for the squeezing of hands, even the encircling of waists! . . . Dutifully he turned to Laura. Laura was not even looking at him. She was studying backs, and horribly bored. Then she glanced up at the boxes overhead, and her expression changed and became animated as Peter recognized a familiar face, old, haggard, beaky, furnished with fierce eyes, generally screened by large spectacles, hovering above the red plush elbow-ledge.

"Your Aunt Mordred!" he said.

"Dear me!" whispered Laura, "so it is!" And just how the aged lady came to be present in a box at *The Coster Girl*, a class of entertainment denounced by her as damning and disgusting, cannot be explained. "She is scowling furiously," Laura added, in an undertone. "Don't you suppose she *knows*?"

"She is beckoning to us to come up," said Peter, as Lady Mordred's prehistoric black bonnet wagged, and her shrunken, black-kidded finger beckoned sternly to Laura.

"I'm afraid," said Peter's beloved, "she doesn't mean *you*!" and the full-flavoured scowl directed at Peter by the old lady bore out the truth of Laura's observation. Indeed, Lady Mordred was at that moment bestowing the title of "unmitigated rascal" on her niece's betrothed. She had always waged bitter war against Peter; nobody had been able to explain to her, through her terrible trumpet, why Peter was no longer objectionable, and the reasons that had filtered through that medium Lady Mordred considered none.

"Come up, come up!" her nodding old bonnet and her wagging old finger commanded.

Laura rose meekly and squeezed out of the stalls, followed by Peter, who was conscious of a return of the desire to follow in the wake of her well-known, erstwhile too-familiar form.

So the couple went up and knocked at Lady Mordred's box, and responded to the grunt that bade them enter.

"Dear aunt, how kind of you to call us!" cried Lady Laura, bestowing the peck of cool kinship upon the leather-purse-like cheek offered her by the venerable lady.

"I saw you disgracing yourself and your family down there in the stalls," snorted Lady Mordred, "and I said to Johnson"—she indicated the limp, drab figure of her companion—"Johnson, what am I to do?" "Tell her ladyship to come up!" said Johnson—the only sensible remark she's made in a year—and I did. "Sit down!" She pushed a chair forward for Laura, and turned a malevolent look on Peter. "What's that man doing here? Send him away—send him away at once! Why don't you, you little fool?" She proffered her trumpet and waited for a reply.

"Dear Aunt," cried Lady Laura, into the dark recesses of the instrument, "I cannot do anything of the kind! We——"

"Mind! Let him mind if he likes. Who's he, a beggarly soldier, that my niece should be at his beck and call?" grunted Lady Mordred.

Tingling with indignation, Peter stepped forwards. The trumpet yawned at him—he shouted into it the information that where Lady Mordred's niece was, he, Peter, had the undoubted right to be; that with the consent of Lady Laura's family they were formally engaged.

"Horribly enraged!" Anyone would be, to see her own flesh and blood, the daughter of her own brother, thrown away on a nobody!" said Lady Mordred, one of whose most unlovable peculiarities consisted in the uncom-

promising plainness of her speech. “‘Consent’... Never, while I live! and if my niece has any desire to profit by my will—”

“S’sh!” cried voices from the pit and gallery, as the curtain went up on the second act.

Peter retired to the back of the box, where he could see nothing but the silhouette of Lady Mordred’s ancient Sibylline profile, the back view of Laura’s towering hat, the coils of Laura’s hair. . . . Oddly enough, he was contented with the view. Opposition had awakened the passion lulled to sleep by the anodyne of security—he asked nothing better of Fate than to look at the back of Laura’s head and know that her heart was his. In a dark interval during a change of scene, he murmured the word “Darling” in her ear, he prisoned her hand; her return pressure sent new life tingling through his veins. . . .

“We’ll run away from my aunt when we’ve put her into her carriage, won’t we, pet?” Laura whispered, and Peter found himself answering rapturously: “My own, we will!”

They did it as they had planned. Peter hailed a four-wheeler, assisted Laura to her seat, and sprang in after her with the manner of Young Lochinvar.

“Aunt Mordred will never be reconciled to my marrying you,” sighed Laura, as her lover kissed her. “To her dying day she will keep the grudge alive!”

“Yes. I think—indeed, I am sure,” said Peter, “that I have a life-long enemy in her!”

“It seems so odd and incomprehensible,” said Laura, with the little laugh that Peter had only that day mentally stigmatized as a titter, “that *anybody* should hate *you*!”

The remainder of the sentence was impeded and remained unfinished, and a few minutes later:

“Hanover Square!” said Peter.

“Oh, he has driven us to the very door!” cried Lady Laura, in a flutter. “Suppose Constantia should be

looking out of the drawing-room window ?" she added nervously.

"It doesn't matter if she is !" said Peter, with a feeling of being damped.

Laura's face fell.

"Of course, it doesn't matter !" Her manner was bored and listless again. "Will you come in ?" she said, without enthusiasm.

"Thanks, no !" said Peter, his thoughts yearning towards Pall Mall. "I promised to meet a man at the Club !"

He took off his hat, and Laura went up the steps and into the house.

"See you to-morrow," she said, turning on the doorstep with a vague smile, a half-formed wave of the hand.

Peter knew she would see him—knew he should see her, that there was no exhilarating uncertainty, no delightful doubt about it. He bowed his big head upon his breast, and went away despondently in the direction of Pall Mall.

## XXI

## FULL-SIZED JAMES

## I

JIMMY MEGGATT had run up North with his chum Wade for a fortnight's May-fly fishing in the Speed. His twenty-first birthday, occurring upon the last day of this impromptu vacation, broke in a Scotch drizzle. He leaned out from the window of his bedroom at the Quern House into a green gloom perpendicularly laced with silver rain. For a wood of ancient oaks and beeches, firs, birches, and bird-cherries mustered close about the antique dwelling. Blackbirds were shouting to each other from tree to tree, triumphing over the wicked east wind that had laid by its scourges, predicting sunshine presently, promising ripe cherries at the end of June. A thrush, solitary, outlawed, and despondent, on the outskirts of the wood, kept calling, complaining, insisting upon one name, and that not a bird's.

"Cissy Wade, Cissy Wade!" with eager, tremulous entreaty. "Cissy Wa-a-a-de!" with the utmost sweetness of which bird-bill and bird-throat were capable, tenderly coaxing, suavely prolonged, dying out at length in sheer despair of Cissy's ever coming; then, after a disconsolate pause, three rallying notes, sharp and metallic as the "tack-tack-tack" of steel meeting flint . . . then the whole performance over again.

There was nothing remarkable or extraordinary to Jimmy in the infatuation of the bird; its tone as of hopeless rivalry was really flattering to a young man who had walked in

the old walled garden of the Quern House with Miss Cissy for a fortnight of enchanted evenings, whose glory and glamour deepened with every sunset, culminating upon the previous night in declaration upon Jimmy's part, confession upon Cissy's, and a psycho-alchemical process which both young people confidently believed to be the fusion of two souls into one.

Cissy's eyes and cheeks were divinely conscious as Jimmy, well-tubbed, well-dressed, well-mannered, well-looking, after the fashion of a youth who has been bred to the healthful exercise of his muscles in outdoor sports, and has had his classics and mathematics knocked into him at a public school, took his place at Mrs. Wade's breakfast-table. Two letters were delivered to him in the course of the meal. One was directed in the small, aggressively clear, business handwriting of Mr. Bastock, Jimmy's guardian. The other envelope, a large, thin, square one, displayed the gigantic penmanship which Jimmy had been brought up to associate with the idea of his father. Colonel Meggatt's letter was dated from Paris—envelope and paper bore the address of one of the more exclusive hotels. The exigencies of the story require that the epistle should be quoted in its entirety—

“HÔTEL COSMOPOLITAIN,  
“*May 24th.*

“MY DEAR SON,

“On the day this reaches you, you will, please Almighty God, have reached your twenty-first year, to which anaversary” [Colonel Meggatt was not at all times an accurate speller] “your mother and myself have looked forward with anxiety for many years. We have been proud to receive from our good friend, Mr. Bastock, as from your own hand, such excellent reports of your progress, since you left Harrow, in the study of your chosen profession, though your mother and myself unite in hoping

that you will not overdo it in reading for the Bar, as no good can ever be expected from overtaxing a young man's brain. We are happy and gratified to hear that the celebrated solicitor, Mr. Pawley Wotherspoon, who, you tell us, is preparing you for admission to the Inns of Court, has expressed a good opinion of your qualifications for the law, and send by Parcel-Post, duty paid, for his acceptance four boxes of choice Havana cigars (out of a dozen graciously presented to me by His Excellency the President of the Republic of France, to whom your mother and I had the honour to be presented a few evenings back). Now I will close, my dear son, with the most warmly affectionate birthday wishes from your mother and myself. It is our wish that you should go up to town and see Mr. Bastock (who up to now has held your money-affairs in charge and controlled your expenditure). Being of full age, funds will now be placed in your own hands, and we hope you will employ them to advantage. Further, there are some family matters which you are now intitaled to know. With regard to these, you will be left to your own discretion as regards future steps, and you may rest assured that neither your mother nor myself will ever reproach you if those steps should take you away from us. Whatever your ultimate decision may be, we are prepared to abide by it. *Whatever your ultimate decision may be, we are prepared to abide by it!* My dear son, I remaine your affectionate father,

“ PETER J. MEGGATT.

“ P.S.—Your mother sends her fondest love.”

## II

Young James Meggatt had never seen his parents, in the flesh or in counterfeit representation. As, to his knowledge, he possessed no other living relatives, he was acquainted

with but one human being who might authoritatively claim familiarity with Colonel and Mrs. Meggatt, and that person had never been communicative on the subject.

Mr. Bastock, Jimmy's guardian, who up to the present had held his affairs in charge and regulated his expenditure—to quote again from the Colonel's letter—was a small, dry, close-shaven man with keen eyes, a remarkably mobile countenance, and a singularly wearied skin, which obeyed the vivid play of his facial muscles as though unwilling to take part in a performance. His manner was curt, though not uncourteous; a continual pressure of business preoccupied his eye and curtailed his conversations with his ward. He occupied an office in a street leading Thames-ward from the Strand, and Jimmy knew him, from a brief printed legend heading his correspondence, to be the London agent and business-representative of a syndicate of American capitalists, whose principal ventures were in connection with places of public entertainment in every quarter of the civilized world.

Only in Jimmy's very early recollections Mr. Bastock had not appeared in the strict business relations which afterwards he assumed towards his ward. When Jimmy was a very tiny Jimmy indeed, and lived, with several other boys and girls, in the house of a kindly elderly lady who dwelt at Margate—Margate of sand-castle and donkey-riding memories!—Mr. Bastock used regularly to come down once a month to judge for himself of the boy's mental and physical growth. In those days Jimmy had been wont to regard him as a benevolent sorcerer whose pockets contained most of the things in which small boys delight, had shrieked with laughter at his funny songs and stories, the fun of which was deliciously enhanced by Mr. Bastock's weird, but enviable power of changing his face and altering his voice into the face or voice of any man, woman, or animal he chose to represent. But, as his ward grew older

and bigger—old enough and big enough at eight to be sent to board at the house of a clerical tutor at Canterbury, in preparation for the twelfth birthday which should qualify him for election as a pupil of Harrow School, Mr. Bastock retired into himself, and was never thenceforward seen by his ward or his ward's preceptors in any character but that of a grey, reserved, business-like little man. But fitful fancies would occur to Jimmy; and on occasions, when his guardian would be gravely discoursing with his tutor—once, when Mr. Bastock was engaged in seemly conversation with the Doctor himself—the boy caught himself wondering whether the versatility that could imitate to the life a monkey, or a costermonger, or an old Irishwoman, or anything else that Mr. Bastock chose, was at the bottom of his looking and speaking at that moment so very like a Headmaster and D.D., and in effect, whether Mr. Bastock was acting and knew it? or whether without knowing it Mr. Bastock was acting?

Jimmy was happy at Harrow; he had been sent there to get a good tone, and he got it—to make friends, and he made them. He developed, not into an athlete or a genius, but into a pleasant, well-bred young fellow, with a soft voice, silky brown hair, and clear eyes, and a well-knit frame which was rather slight than muscular. He left Harrow without having achieved a dazzling reputation for scholarship, it is true; but he was fairly grounded in history and classics, and what was fondly termed by admiring friends a “dab” in English Literature, and, when given his choice of a profession, he gave the preference to the Bar. He was reading now for his final examination with Mr. Pawley Wotherspoon, who was a friend of Mr. Bastock's—in his quiet, unobtrusive way, Bastock seemed to know everybody! Most of the litigations in which Mr. Pawley Wotherspoon was concerned were theatrical cases; he was one of the few living legal authori-

ties capable—according to Mr. Bastock—of advising on matters connected with dramatic copyright, and there was a story floating about the Inns to the effect that he had once been an actor; and that Mrs. Pawley Wotherspoon had, in the later fifties, figured in the fringed trunks, silken fleshings, and side-spring boots inseparable from *opéra bouffe*.

It is not to be assumed that Jimmy had ever been neglected by the parents who so plainly preferred to delegate their duties to salaried representatives. Much money had been spent, and spent wisely, upon him. No anniversary dear to childhood or anticipated by youth had ever gone by unmarked by an affectionate letter in the colossal handwriting of the Colonel, dated from one or other of the capitals of the world, the spelling as varied and quaint as the stamp and postmark, but breathing through its quaint, homely phrases and continual repetitions, sentiments of unmistakable tenderness, solicitude, and paternal pride. Mrs. Meggatt never wrote; but messages from her and presents from her were never wanting.

Jimmy had conceived an idea of his mother as a tall, pale, brown-haired lady, faded by foreign suns, invariably attired in highly-coloured, trailing silks, profuse in the detail of jewellery—the studs, watches, rings, and other things she had sent her son from time to time were absurdly costly—invalidish, kindly, perhaps a little affected, perhaps a little made-up. His father he could see whenever he chose to shut his eyes and summon up the vision: tall, stout, loose-jointed, large-featured, double-chinned; sanguine of complexion and loud of voice, as the English-speaking tourist usually is. He would be baldish, with a red nape to his neck, and snow-white whiskers which would stick out assertively over a collar of the Gladstone type. His eyes were undoubtedly grey-blue, some shades paler than Jimmy's. He possessed quantities of waist-

coats, all composed of materials suitable for wear in hot climates ; was given to the wearing of alpaca coats and shepherd's-plaid trousers, and faddish in the matter of costly Panama hats and expensive cigars. He was under-educated, that was plain, and of a simple nature. And he spent his life in travelling from foreign capital to foreign capital, was personally acquainted with every Crowned Head in Europe, and received complimentary presents from them, as well as boxes of rare Havanas from Presidents of Republics ! He made statements of the above kind frequently, simply, and without the slightest bombast. They came in in the middle or near the end of the Colonel's letters, naturally and as events of habitual occurrence, but as invariably as the head of King Charles was wont to crop up in the manuscripts of Mr. Dick. . . . Jimmy had had his dark hours of haunting doubt and suspicion, when he would wonder whether, after all, his father might not be a little—say, liable to delusions, which necessitated constant change of air and scene in the interests of the sufferer ? But, unable to endure these dark conjectures, he had hinted of their existence in one of his half-yearly interviews with Mr. Bastock, who infringed his usual rule of non-responsiveness to direct questions by electrically volting out an answer that effectually banished Jimmy's bogies. "Mad ! Your father ! . . . No more than you or me, or the Archbishop of Canterbury ! And your mother is as sensible a woman as ever drew breath !" But more he would not say ; and now, within the week following upon his twenty-first birthday, Jimmy was, for the first time, to hear something of "famaly matters."

Why was the Colonel's letter so suggestive of uneasiness, of agitation, of an almost tremulous anxiety with regard to those "future steps" to be taken by his son ? Why was Jimmy so eagerly assured that neither his mother or his father would ever reproach him if he should cut himself

adrift from such anchorage as the love of unknown parents may prove to an unknown son ? Why were Colonel and Mrs. Meggatt prepared to abide by his decision ? What was the secret, if there was a secret, which that grave of mystery, Bastock, was about to give up ? Even with Cissy's topaz eyes shooting golden shafts at him from their ambush of curved black lashes, Jimmy asked himself this question over and over again. Even with the memory of yesternight's kisses stinging on his lips, Jimmy wondered. It had never occurred to him until this moment that the carefully guarded secret might affect the legitimacy of his birth—that he might prove to be a natural son ! That newly awakened doubt was a leaden bias in his heart, inclining him to the angle of despondency.

### III

The trees of the Quern House wood possessed a westward inclination, the result of continuous thrashing by stiff easterly gales. Round about, the grey-green mountains lifted their towering heads, Quern Craig looking down upon the old grey mansion that stood between its larch-covered feet with a certain weather-worn expression of benevolence. In the heart of the wood, a bowshot from the dwelling, was an ancient garden, in shape an oblong, guarded by high stone walls. There were two doors in the wall, south and west ; above their lintels the date 1740. Outside, trees crowding up to the walls ; within, daisied lawns, prim walks, a central sun-dial. Fruit-trees pollarded to the height of the walls, mossy old gooseberry and currant-bushes covered with green bunches of blossom, rhibes, pink-tasselled, haunted of bees ; beds full of primulas, daffodils, forget-me-nots, wallflowers of every shade to the rare purple ; jonquils, narcissus, tulips ; masses of exquisite colour and bloom pent in between borders of

the blue gentianella, and of pansies, yellow, violet, grey, creamy-white, and red. Rich promise of future strawberry-feasts in well-ordered litter-beds, stately clumps of rhubarb, magnificent pears, peaches, and plums, trained on espaliers and against the south wall. And here one might stroll on a windy spring day basking in sunshine, and breathing soft air while the east wind roared harmlessly overhead, and the wild trees outside tossed green arms of entreaty above the garden-wall.

Cissy sat on a green-painted bench, her small, bronze shoes elevated on a green foot-board above the waving grass, waiting for Jimmy, whose name the blackbirds were calling quite distinctly, though the disconsolate thrush of the morning was now dumb. The air was exhilarating, a mingling of the richest spring-flower scents with the resinous perfume of the firs and tasselling larches borne on the cold, clean mountain air. Sheep, reduced by distance to whitish dots, moved on the grey-green velvet of the mountain pastures. The grass-plot was white with snow of daisies ; the sky was the most delicate of aerial blues. It was one of those rare days distinctive of the chill and tardy Northern spring, when the pale-hued, deeply-lined face of Nature is illumined with the exquisite sudden smile that belongs to the saddest woman's face I have ever seen, and to no other.

It was a perfect hour, a perfect atmosphere, a perfect place ; that is, it needed the introduction of but one additional element to be perfect, in Cissy's idea. Cissy was in love—if that may be called love which is a mingling of a gratified vanity with the desire of praise, the desire for caresses, the desire of new and thrilling experience, in the heart of a young girl, newly awakened to the consciousness of power, convinced of the necessity of subjugating and dominating a creature rougher, stronger, fiercer than herself, to her imperious will.

As the click of the latch sounded behind her, and Jimmy's footsteps crunched upon the gravel, the girl rose, and stood waiting beside the green border in the May sunshine that gilded the loosely coiled masses of her bronze-coloured hair, and kissed the pale, clear oval of her cheek, as Jimmy had done last night. She was tall, straight, and active as any young Atalanta, and her black-banded brows gave a curious character of severity to the upper part of the face that was otherwise piquantly, provokingly pretty. She wore a grey-blue skirt of some rough material, with a blouse of white silk gathered about the neck and wrists and embroidered in a dainty honeycomb pattern. About her slender waist was a belt of Russian enamel-work, vivid colours combined in Byzantine patterns. A scarf of old honey-coloured lace was tied about her throat and confined beneath the little cleft chin—perhaps Cissy's prettiest feature—by a little gold frog with diamond eyes. Her own eyes were topazes, clear citron-brown in some lights, wine-yellow in others, and as she lifted them to Jimmy's it is not surprising that the wine should have gone to his head. In the sudden rush and surge of young emotions, in the consciousness that this delightful wonder was his own, that this young goddess was for him a mortal maiden, his shadowy forebodings were swept away.

"Won't you—won't you put on your hat?" Jimmy said, with a slight catching of the breath, pointing to the discarded tam-o'-shanter (grey-blue, like Cissy's gown) that lay upon the bench.

There was neither poetry nor romance in the observation, but a keen ear would have detected in the tone all the difference that lies between the uncertain wooer and the accepted lover.

And then they strolled together round the garden—in and out of magical alleys and up and down enchanted walks. Their talk would not be very interesting to the

reader ; it was full of repetitions. Only those who have loved frequently, and thus gained experience, can infuse any originality into the conduct and the climax of a wooing.

"I haven't said anything to mother yet," said Miss Cissy, as they perambulated. "For one thing, I haven't had an opportunity. And for another, I want to look at you through my own eyes a little longer before I drop back into the habit of using other people's."

The expression gave Jimmy a little twinge.

"Why should you ?" he demanded. "Your own eyes are the loveliest in the world. Why should you use other people's ?"

Cissy gave his arm a little squeeze in acknowledgement of the compliment before she answered the question.

"All girls who have been properly brought up—and I am one of the most properly brought up girls that ever lived," she said—"are taught to look through other people's eyes. When they begin to see with their own, they fall in love, as a rule."

"When they fall out of love, they drop back into the habit of using other people's. Why not wait until that happens ?"

"Ah ! If I were to wait for *that* !" said Cissy, giving another little squeeze to Jimmy's arm. The look and the pressure together were more eloquent than words, and for a moment the conversation was interrupted. Then Miss Wade went on : "Besides, I shall want to see you from all sorts of angles, and from all sorts of points of view. When father bought this dear old place, he invited everybody he knew to come up North and pronounce upon his purchase. Some people went into raptures ; others were frankly disappointed ; many thought it too bracing ; a great many more found it too depressing ; but, the more opinions conflicted, the happier father was. The points of view I shall begin with are mother's and Frank's. You

aren't afraid of being looked at from Frank's point of view, are you?"

"Dear old chap, not a bit!" Jimmy had occasionally found Wade's enthusiasm oppressive, but was grateful for it now.

"When Frank was reading law with Mr. Wotherspoon in London, before father died, and his letters began to be full of you, I used to make fun of him about you," Cissy went on. "And when he brought you back in the Vacation, I used to snub him for quoting you and copying the knot of your necktie, and wearing grey *sûède* gloves because you do. Now I love your neckties, and simply adore your gloves! Don't! Somebody's coming!"

The portly shadow cast upon the path of hard, white river-sand was that of Mrs. Wade, to whom the girl advanced, leading Jimmy by the hand. In such moments the coolness and self-possession of the bravest men are conspicuous by their absence, and Jimmy was no exception to the rule.

"Mother, this is Mr. Meggatt's birthday!" said Cissy, exhibiting the flushed captive with a little air of proprietorship that was quite charming.

"Dear, now! and he never told us!" cried the genial woman. "What shall we do to mark the day, as we have no present to give him?"

"I have made him a present already," remarked Cissy with a whole quiver-full of mischievous golden arrows shooting from between her narrowed eyelids. That is how the announcement of her matrimonial engagement was made by Miss Wade. If Mrs. Wade was not profoundly astonished by the revelation, her reception of it did credit to the histrionic powers of that stout, good-natured, rather vulgar person.

"Mercy me, child!" she cried; "you mean you've given him yourself! Well, there are other people who have

something to say, Mr. Meggatt, you must remember, before you get her." But she beamed maternally on Jimmy, and called him a dear fellow ; and then he was kissed—and to be kissed by a girl's mother after being kissed by the girl is, as Jimmy found on that occasion, very much like eating the silver-foil that wrapped up a piece of butterscotch after you have eaten the toffee. The large fortune possessed by the late Mr. Wade—deceased only a year or two previously—had been made, it may be incidentally mentioned, by manufacture of, and wholesale trade in, this toothsome but eloying luxury. Cissy was good enough for a baronet, thought the wife of the Glasgow sugar-baker, as she walked in to luncheon between the young couple ; but, for all people said, baronets didn't grow on every bush for the picking. And this young fellow was a gentleman ! Hadn't he been educated at Harrow, hob-and-nob with lords and dukes ? Didn't he belong to West-End Clubs upon whose doorsteps Franky, poor, dear boy, might cool his heels till doomsday without ever getting elected ? He had plenty of money ; his father was a Colonel, whether of a cavalry or infantry regiment Mrs. Wade was not quite certain ; but a Colonel, still ; who moved in foreign Court circles and was intimate with Crowned Heads. Married to a gentleman, well-bred and handsome, too, with his well-knit figure and his way of wearing his clothes—clothes that never looked too new—his quiet way of talking, his fine skin, clear eyes, broad shoulders, small, almost womanish, hands and feet—who should say that Cissy hadn't done as well as she might reasonably have been expected to do ? She kissed Jimmy again a few hours later, bidding God bless him as they parted—for he went to London by the night-mail, and called upon Mr. Bastock at his headquarters in the quiet by-street leading Thamesward from the Strand at noon upon the following day. He was at once admitted, and was shown through an outer office, appallingly full, as

it seemed to Jimmy, of lady clerks—though in reality there were only two demure young women clicking off Mr. Bastock's correspondence from shorthand notebooks upon typewriters—into the inner sanctum.

"How d'ye do? How d'ye do? Well?" said Mr. Bastock, without giving Jimmy time to answer. "That's right! And now, what can I do for you?" This was his invariable formula.

He was just the same little, agile, grey, close-shaven, close-cropped man as ever, and his wrinkled, yellowish skin hung even more loosely over the large, mobile muscles of his expressive face. A swift look of keen intelligence shot out of Mr. Bastock's bright black eyes as Jimmy, for answer, drew forth the Colonel's letter and handed it to him.

"Ah—h'm! Yes!" said Mr. Bastock thoughtfully, looking at the letter and not into it. "You're of age this month. Time goes, doesn't it? Ah-h'm! Yes!"

"My father writes of some family matters with which he thinks it necessary that I should be acquainted," commenced Jimmy.

"We'll deal with the money matters first," said Mr. Bastock. He spun round in his revolving office-chair and pulled out a drawer in the American shutter-topped desk at which he had been sitting when Jimmy entered. Then he spun round again, and handed Jimmy a brand-new bank pass-book. "James Quincey Meggatt, Esq.,<sup>4</sup>" was beautifully written upon the clean parchment cover. "Open it and look in," said Mr. Bastock. Jimmy obeyed, and found that on the previous day had been paid into the Anglo-American Union Bank, to the credit of James Quincey Meggatt, Esq., the sum of four thousand pounds. "They'll give you a cheque-book on applying! I should recommend 'To Order,' as being safer than 'To Bearer,' though you'll please yourself, of course. There's another fifteen hundred in sound, reliable stocks—Continental and American Rails,

and so forth," said Mr. Bastock. "South African mines, luckily for him! never had any attraction for the Colonel." He handed over a package of thick, folded papers, neatly tied with stout red tape. "And that's All!"

"I beg your pardon?" said Jimmy. "You mentioned—"

"I mentioned that that was all," said Mr. Bastock; "and I call it a very tidy sum to begin the world with. There's to be no more leading-strings; you're free to do as you like with your own. You've been expensively brought up; a deal of money has been expended upon you—invested, is your father's word. If you have grown up with the notion that you were the heir to a large fortune, the son of a wealthy man, your surroundings have conveyed it to you. *I* never did, and I know your father hasn't! If your ideas are larger than the reality, it's the result of your bringing-up. Excuse me!"

Mr. Bastock touched an electric-bell, as Jimmy sat with wide-open eyes, looking at the bank-book and the tape-sashed bundle of securities, and a pale boy in a brown livery appeared in the doorway.

"Get me a glass of liqueur-brandy," he said, "and tell Miss Jebb that I shall be engaged for a quarter of an hour. Feel a little giddy, eh?"

This question was addressed to Jimmy, who took out his handkerchief and wiped away some of the perspiration which glistened upon his forehead and upon his cheeks, which had lost their healthy colour.

"Perhaps you think your father is to blame for letting you grow up with the idea that you were a rich man's son? But put it his way—look at it from his point of view! If you had gone to Harrow as the son of a person of moderate means, you couldn't have moved among your schoolfellows upon a footing of equality—you wouldn't have got the 'tone' you were sent to Harrow to get. You would have

bothered about your future as soon as you were of an age to do it. You'd have toiled and moiled for scholarships ; you'd have got 'em, I dare say, but at the cost of your 'tone' and your development. Here's the brandy."

He took the glass and handed it to Jimmy.

"Thank you, I don't take spirits so early," Jimmy said a little stiffly.

"Glad to hear it!" said Mr. Bastock drily ; "but on this oceasion, though I'm no advocate of pegging, I advise your breaking your rule." He took up the Colonel's letter and tapped it meaningly. "Those family matters your father mentioned. . . . We haven't touched upon them yet, you know!"

Jimmy drank the brandy.

"Now, put that bank-book and that scrip in your inside pocket," advised his guardian. "Button your coat over and listen to me."

"You speak to me and look at me, sir," said Jimmy, obeying, "as a dentist might who had undertaken to pull out a double-tooth from the jaw of a man with, say, aneurism of the heart. He has it in his power to relieve the patient of his pain, but he may kill him in doing it!"

"I speak to you and look at you," burst out Mr. Bastock, his blaek eyes snapping and a sudden rush of blood darkening his grey skin, "like a middle-aged man who has got to test the manhood in a young one. You have had the sort of training and education that goes to make an English gentleman—though the blood in you is only part English, by the way ! You're going to show me in the next ten minutes whether your father has got anything worth having for his money!"

"My father has been in the Army, sir," said Jimmy, with pale lips. "I don't doubt he was a brave officer. I—I hope I shall come through your test in a—a way that—that is worthy of a soldier's son!"

"Your father was never in the Army!" said Mr. Bastock, darting as with relief at the opening afforded. "The title of 'Colonel' is only complimentary. Fanciful," said Mr. Bastock, rubbing his blue chin; "assumed to attract, like the prefixes usually adopted"—he threw a keen glance at Jimmy as he launched the last word—"by professionals."

"Sir," said Jimmy in a small, colourless, quiet voice which he had never heard before, and the sound of which made Mr. Bastock jump in his chair, "will you kindly tell me to what profession my father belongs?"

"Call him a public entertainer," said Mr. Bastock.

"My mother—," Jimmy was beginning.

"Call her a public entertainer," retorted Mr. Bastock; "and then you haven't done with it!" He waited a moment to let the statement sink in, watching the white young face opposite him before he spoke again. "Both your father and your mother are members of a celebrated travelling troupe—"

"Of performers?" said Jimmy in the tone that was so unlike his ordinary voice.

"Of people like themselves, who are brave enough and energetic enough," said Mr. Bastock, emphasizing every word with a forensic wag of his big forefinger, "to employ to their own profit and for the benefit of those *who are dependent upon them*" —the keen black eyes looked through Jimmy's blue ones, into his very brain, it seemed—"those physical disqualifications and drawbacks which separate them from the great majority of their fellow-creatures."

There was a pause.

"I should like the truth plainly and in as few words as possible," said the small, quiet voice which was so unlike Jimmy's, and so like another which Mr. Bastock knew. The sweat started in beads upon his parchment-

skinned, deeply furrowed forehead, as he complied with the request.

"Your father and mother are performing dwarfs!"

There was a rustle, followed by a silence so dead that the buzz of a fly upon the window-pane seemed to fill the whole office. In the chair—a mock rose-wood affair with arms—which Jimmy had occupied the moment before, something like a suit of clothes had collapsed. There was a face hanging over to the left, but it might have been drawn in grey ink on white blotting-paper, it was so flat and so perfectly expressionless; there were hands and feet, but they looked as unreal as though they belonged to a stuffed dummy.

"Poor boy!" thought Mr. Bastock, bending over the figure in the chair, with the tears running down his nose, "he's taken it hard—very! I wish to the Lord I hadn't had to tell him!" Then a gleam of keen, professional interest came into his little black eyes as he straightened himself, and he rubbed his chin contemplatively. "If an actor were to copy *that*—upon the stage, they'd call it inartistic—the fools who go to see plays, and the ignoramuses who go to criticize them! A queer world!—a queer world!" Mr. Bastock shook his bullet-head and rang for some more brandy.

#### IV

The death of pride in the human heart is accompanied by as many foamings and writhings, contortions and convulsions, as attend the death of a man or any other mammal poisoned by strychnine. When at last the life is fairly out of the body, that remains as a grotesque and hideous thing, twisted and gnarled out of all likeness to its former self, until decomposition successfully reduces it in the cold erueible of the grave to a certain volume of mingled gases and a few handfuls of dust.

Jimmy was in Paris, which, after London, looked strangely bright, airy, and clean, sitting at breakfast under the shade of a striped awning in the courtyard of his hotel. There was fruit upon the table, its hues and odours grateful to his senses, parched and jaded by the gritty all-night journey ; there were crusty rolls and tempting butter ; a smart and civil waiter poured frothing milk and coffee into a great white crockery cup and brought him poached eggs and pink ham. The animal soul of Jimmy was quickened by the sight of these things, and his material body fell to and fed and was strengthened, even while his sad spirit sat apart and wept.

What had brought him across the Channel ? He had not told Mr. Bastock of his intended journey when he parted with his guardian on the previous day ; he had not mentioned it even to himself. Not even when he stepped into a money-changer's at Charing Cross and invested in a handful of silver coins—frances and five-franc pieces ; not when he strapped and locked his portmanteau and bag ; not even when he had taken his ticket and his seat in the Victoria boat-train, had he acknowledged to himself anything further than that his destination was Paris. And now that he was in Paris he maintained this curious reserve with himself. Nothing could induce Jimmy to admit to Jimmy what Jimmy's motive was in coming.

His bodily hunger satisfied, he pushed the breakfast-things away and leaned his elbows on the coarse white cloth and fell to thinking over things that Bastock had said yesterday, before and after he, Jimmy, had made a fool of himself by fainting like a woman. Not that Jimmy had ever seen a woman faint, but he had been brought up to associate swooning with the weaker sex. The voice of the little grey man with the snapping black eyes was in his ears, as plainly as though Bastock sat before him, repeating :

"The title of Colonel is only complimentary. Fanciful ! Assumed to attract, like the prefixes usually adopted by professionals. . . . Call him a public entertainer. . . . Call your mother a public entertainer . . . and then you haven't done with it!"

And then ! Someone touched Jimmy, and he started. It was the waiter ; the man was asking whether Monsieur would not take a little glass of liqueur.

A vague desire to be dramatic and romantic in his wretchedness made Jimmy say that he would take an absinthe ; and the sensitive, boyish vanity, which had outlived his dead pride, was wounded by the waiter's taking the order so calmly, and going away into the sunshine with a tray of clattering crockery things as though no young man had taken the fatal plunge that must end in insanity and death. But Bastock was speaking : there was no way of getting away from him :

"Both your father and your mother are members of a celebrated travelling troupe of people like themselves, who are brave enough and energetic enough to employ to their own profit and the benefit of those who are dependent upon them——"

"Horrible !" Jimmy winced and shuddered and shut his eyes.

"Those physical disqualifications and drawbacks which separate them from the great majority of their fellow-creatures. Your father and mother are——"

Jimmy opened his eyes.

"I can't bear it !" he said, so loudly that some English and Americans who were breakfasting at the tables in his immediate vicinity looked round. "I cannot bear it !"

"Dwarfs—performing dwarfs !"

He clenched the hand that rested on the table and looked down at it, first indifferently, then curiously, then with breathless interest and something like fear. For theise t

time since his hobble-de-hoyish indifference had been tickled by a compliment to consciousness, he was not proud of the feminine smallness and delicacy of his hands and feet in contrast with his well-knit figure, breadth of shoulder, and depth of chest. A Rajput's gauntlet and stirrup would have fitted Meggatt, a school-fellow at Harrow, who himself was heir to the throne of an Indian principality, had been wont to say. . . . Were these the inherited traits of those "physical disqualifications" of which Bastock had spoken? Signs of atavism—warnings? The old walled garden at the Quern House rose up before the unhappy young man, and Cissy's breath was on his cheek and Cissy's eyes looked into his. He loved her with a better love in this moment than he had ever felt for her before. That old love of yesterday was selfish, conceited, patronizing; for Jimmy had never disguised from himself his conviction that the Wades were, socially, far beneath his own level. He had repeated to himself many times since it had become clear to him that he loved Cissy,—that he wanted Cissy and no other girl in the wide world to be his own, "*The husband elevates the wife.*" He had had the idea of elevating Miss Wade above her plebeian surroundings, of folding his own purple-bordered mantle about her, of bestowing upon her, with the title of Mrs. James Meggatt, the cachet of well-bred exclusiveness which Nature, in her most bountiful mood, could hardly confer upon the simple child of a mere sugar-baker.

Mrs. James Meggatt! Why, it was not certain! Mr. Bastock had forgotten to tell Jimmy whether the name was the Colonel's own, or had been assumed with the quasi-military title! And what a dignity should be conferred with the name! And what an heritage might not be handed on with it!

The absinthe was set before Jimmy with a water-carafe. ~~He~~ knew that an habitual drinker usually poured a little

water into the glass, partially filled with the pale-greenish liqueur, and then watched the opaline changes of colour that resulted before he knocked another nail into his coffin by swallowing the mixture. He followed prescriptive rule, and drank and found it nasty, and thought he caught a fleeting twinkle in the waiter's eye as he coughed a little and made an involuntary grimace. But it strung his nerves and spurred him to call for his bill and pay for it, and then he lighted a cigarette and was surprised to find that he still enjoyed the flavour of the good Turkish tobacco, in spite of all that had befallen since yesterday. And then he strolled out of the courtyard and hailed the white-capped chauffeur of a ramshackle little red-painted taxi-cab, and gave the address, "Cirque des Nations." A functionary of the hotel, standing near, interfered before the white-capped chauffeur had whipped off with his prey.

Did Monsieur know that the Cirque would not be open until two of the clock, when there would be a matinée performance? If Monsieur was about to proceed to the Cirque for the purpose of booking a seat, Monsieur might spare himself the trouble. A word to M. Surion of the bureau in the vestibule and Monsieur could be supplied.

"Thank you. I only want to—to drive past and look at the outside of the place. I've heard something of it," said Jimmy, with difficulty; "and I'd like to see it, thank you." And the ramshackle taxi, being put into violent motion, conveyed Jimmy through the bright, bustling, cleanly thoroughfares, vivid with active life, to the Cirque, at whose magnificent gilded portals he paid and dismissed the white-capped chauffeur.

It was yet early. Jimmy was reassured to see that only a few bloused workmen and idle loungers were lingering about the doors of the big, opulent building, with its domed roof of gilded glass, its gorgeous sculptured façade

of showy marbles ornamented with groups of equestrian figures ; its array of life-sized photographs and gigantic coloured posters illustrating the wonders to be seen within, comprising, amongst other exquisite novelties, the celebrated whistling entertainmont of Madame Smithers, the Australian Bird of Mockery ; the marvellous equestrian feats of the Celebrated Centaur Family ; the Seven Balancing Bonnellis in their electrifying plank-and-ladder interlude ; Madame la Comtesse Püspök Ladany (known in the most distinguished Society circles as the Beautiful Hungarian, and heroine of the most sensational of recent divorce cases) in her Elegant Equestrian Feats upon the highly trained Arab Maimouni, assisted by Rurik the Gitano (who had the honour, on the occasion above alluded to, of eloping with Madame la Comtesse). Then, attention was clamorously invited to the Mermaids, wonders of nata-tion ! . . . Mdlle. Minota, the American Girl-Giantess, nineteen years of age, nine feet in height, weighing two hundred and seventy-six pounds ; able to lift a weight of one hundred and forty pounds with one hand . . . and the Marvellous Mignons, a talented troupe of eight of the smallest human prodigies known to the civilized globe—mimics, dancers, jugglers, musicians, singers. One must not fail to see Colonel Peter in his world-famed triumphs of prestidigitation ; or hear the unequalled imitations of popular songstresses given by Madame Tiny. To-day at Two ! To-night at Ten !

Other announcements followed, but Jimmy read no more. White-lipped and blank-eyed, he stared at the flaring crimson letters on the huge yellow poster. He had found what he sought. Sensation was dead ; there remained only a numbness, with a stupid conviction that, if it had been possible to feel, he would have been suffering horribly.

To-day at two, Colonel Peter would juggle and Madame Tiny would give her rapture-evoking imitations of popular

music-hall houris. And Colonel Peter was his father, and his mother was Madame Tiny.

Someone near him seemed to utter a hoarse, choking sound that was half a laugh, half a sob. Jimmy looked round, and saw a small, wizened, bright-eyed boy staring at him. The small boy instantly grimaced and fled to the shelter of a column where lurked another small boy. Then they both put out their tongues, and said the things that small street-urchins in England say to foreigners. And when a vehicle like a hotel-omnibus, only shinier, drawn by a pair of stout grey horses, was driven past, with a dual shriek they instantly pursued it. Jimmy followed more slowly upon their dusty little heels, arriving at a tall, semi-private side-door, so highly varnished as to appear seldom used ; and which, in a non-Republican country, would have been a Royal entrance. As the shiny vehicle, which was of unusual height, and the curtains of which were closely drawn, came to a standstill, two men, fiercely moustached and dressed in a kind of Commissionnaire's uniform, buff with black facings and silver lace—Jimmy afterwards recognized it as the livery worn by the male attendants of the Cirque—got down from the box-seat, and while one of them unlocked the private door with a pass-key, the other opened the door of the shiny omnibus ; and Gavroche and his companion broke into ear-splitting whoops of joy as a colossal foot and ankle, apparelled in a pink silk stocking and a rosetted black satin shoe, the dainty femininity of which grotesquely emphasized its enormous proportions, cautiously descended to the ground. . . .

“ Oh, what a leg !”

“ Come along, *ma cocotte* ! Don't be shy !”

The vast pink silk stocking and the tremendous satin shoe, thus adjured by Gavroche and Co., wavered, hesitated, and were modestly drawn up again. From the interior of the shiny omnibus came a mooing, plaintive, feminine voice :

"Bapteest!"

"*Oui, Mademoiselle?*" from the uniformed functionary who held the door open.

"Kwe faire, Bapteest?"

Baptiste suggested that Mademoiselle should descend.

"Je ne voo par, Bapteest, while these horrid boys are here!" Jimmy caught a glimpse of a large, pale, moon-like face, and as a hand whose proportions matched that of the foot and ankle previously described, drew aside a corner of a window-blind, he knew that he looked, free of charge, upon the celebrated Miss Minota. "Ally voo ong, mechangs! Go away, you nasty little creatures!" exclaimed the giantess, in a flutter of distress, which so hugely delighted Gavroche and Co. that they broke into a war-dance.

Still Baptiste urgently repeated that Mademoiselle must positively descend, and, after some more hesitation, Mademoiselle did; coming out of the omnibus by gradual instalments, until she stood upright on the pavement, her nine-feet-odd-inches of height handsomely increased by a vast hat with a plume of ostrich-feathers, which might have done duty for the central ornament of a canopy of state. But MM. Gavroche, having danced to exhaustion, were now standing on their heads directly in Miss Minota's path. There is nothing particularly appalling in the exhibition of the soles of four little grimy feet reversed, two grinning mouths ditto, and two pairs of twinkling eyes partially obscured by a cataract of particoloured rags. Yet the giantess, whose vast height and bulk were on a scale with her timidity, hung back in ludicrous embarrassment. The uniformed attendants grinned, but offered no assistance; and Jimmy could think of nothing but a large, mild elephant harassed by a couple of shaggy Skye-terrier pups.

In his amusement and his compassion, mingled with

another emotion difficult to define, he stepped forwards. The Gavroches found themselves turned right end up, and smartly shaken in the process. Jimmy, keeping the Arabs in check with the swing of his walking-stick, a sturdy piece of British timber calculated to appeal to the possessors of naked shins, lifted his hat to Miss Minota, indicating that the way was clear. . .

"Oh, thank you, I'm sure!" said the giantess with tremendous bashfulness. A blush covered her immense cheeks as she inclined the huge plumed hat in acknowledgement of Jimmy's courtesy, and it was as if a Californian Redwood had bowed before a tempest. She swept past him, and it was as though the mainsail of a yacht had gone over on the starboard-tack, emptying the wind out of an acre of canvas. Then Miss Minota went in at the private door—not without difficulty. The attendants followed; the omnibus drove off. Jimmy and the Gavroches remained upon the pavement.

Said Gavroche the First, keeping at a safe distance—

"Did you see the Englishman—sacred imbecile!—making up to the big one—*hein?*?"

Returned Gavroche the Second—

"*Dame, oui, j'veois bien!* I should like to be by when she sits on his lap!"

"One, two! *Pouache*—and Mademoiselle looks for the Englishman under the chair! But there isn't any Englishman left, *saisissez vous?*—so she sweeps up the omelette and gets another sweetheart!"

On Jimmys' exhibiting no tendency to take vengeance for these biting sarcasms, the combined speculations of the Gavroches became more daring still. Failing to evoke any demonstration, they taxed their facial powers to the utmost in a final series of grimaces, and departed, only once looking back to yell "Fashoda!"

The doors of the Cirque were open by this time, and

people pouring in. Carriages and omnibuses discharged their loads ; Mimi the dress-maker and Madame la Duchesse jostled at the portals ; Jimmy took his place in the queue that had already formed near the box-office, and secured a fauteuil seat, for which he paid five francs. He found himself close to the ring, with his knees against the low barrier which encircled the sand-strewn space, a clammy sensation about the palms of the hands, and his heart drumming heavily against his ribs. The gorgeous dome, all glass and gilding, the pretty ladies in the boxes, the orchestra tuning in a gilded balcony on the left of the stage, the people who pushed past him into their places, seemed made of dream-stuff. A circular steel railing rose about the ring, and a burly lion-tamer went through his performance ; his snarling, tawny pupils were driven back into their quarters, the railings disappeared, and the celebrated Centaur Family exhibited their feats of horsemanship. . . . There were bursts of applause, shouts of laughter from the audience ; but the cleverness and daring of the riders, the drolleries of the clowns, were lost upon one spectator. A faint smile came upon his set young face, a gleam of recognition into his heavy eyes, as the embroidered tableau-curtains rose upon a scene representing an Oriental Palace, and revealed Mdlle. Minota, diademed, sceptred, and robed with Eastern magnificence, sitting upon a gilded throne. She rose and bowed to the right, to the left, to the middle. . . . The band struck up a march as she descended from the stage by a flight of red-covered steps, and solemnly promenaded round the arena, half-a-dozen negro children carrying her train, a voluble gentleman in evening-dress, who acted as interpreter, accompanying her progress. She was indeed an overwhelming example of feminine development as she gravely performed her tour, replying in monosyllables to the remarks that were conveyed to her through the gentle-

man in evening-dress. It seemed to Jimmy that Miss Minota recognized him ; and, as her monumental proportions moved by, he found himself seized by the impulse to rise up and arrest her progress, as a dozen other people had done, by intimating a desire to shake her enormous hand. But Mdlle. Minota returned to the stage, made her farewell salutation, and was concealed by the descending and closing curtains without any such demonstration on Jimmy's part. And then the march changed to a lively gallop, and, amidst the jingling of tiny bells, the trampling of tiny hoofs, the cracking of toy whips, two miniature coaches, heavily gilded, drawn by teams of ponies twenty-five inches high and driven by monkeys in cocked-hats and laced liveries, dashed into the arena, wheeled twice round it at full speed, then stopped. And the little ladies and gentlemen now getting out—these were the Marvellous Mignons.

There were eight of them—four men and four women, the men in correct evening-dress, the ladies in *décolletée* ball-costumes, wearing feathered and beflowered hats and a good deal of jewellery. One by one they were lifted by a uniformed attendant to the velvet-cushioned summit of the low barrier which enclosed the arena. Arm-in-arm, and with a certain assumption of fashionable assurance, they promenaded round it, bowing and smiling to the public . . . becking and nodding like so many mechanical dolls. They were peaky, wizened, and careworn under their professional paint ; one or two of the men had heads that palpably belonged to full-sized people ; one of the little ladies was painfully deformed. . . . Jimmy shuddered and leaned back in his seat as the procession drew near. . . . He closed his eyes, not daring to search amongst those faces for one that his own might resemble. . . . Surges of shame, of rage, of loathing unspeakable, seemed to rise up and overwhelm him ; he gasped for breath with white

lips ; he was suffocating . . . choking . . . dying ! as the Marvellous Mignons passed, and the public comments, rose up about him, a chorus of voices, admiring, jeering, pitying. . . .

Some minutes elapsed before he forced himself to see and hear. The little coaches had jingled away with their freight of stunted humanity. A little table with a crimson velvet cover had been placed in the middle of the ring ; before the little table stood a little male figure, juggling with a pair of china candlesticks and a couple of lighted candles, and, for the first time in his conscious life, James Meggatt saw his father.

The Colonel appeared to be about three feet high. He was well-proportioned ; his head, unlike those of several of his fellow-performers, appeared to have been made for him ; and but for the deep lines in his forehead—revealed by Jimmy's opera-glass—and the crow's feet about his temples, he might have passed for a little boy. He had a round, childish face, and round eyes of a pale colour—probably blue ; and his light brown hair was parted on one side and smoothed into a stiff crest, as though his nurse had done it with a wet brush. He had all the air of a good little boy, and rather a dull one, too, as he went conscientiously through the feats of legerdemain which, according to the posters, had enraptured most of the Crowned Heads of Europe. The tricks were very easy ones, with candles, as aforesaid, with a lighted cigar, with a hat, and with halfpence, which the Colonel tossed into the air in succession and caught one by one in his waistcoat-pocket—when he did not drop them on the ground. Truth to tell, he bungled many more times than he succeeded ; but, despite the poverty of the whole exhibition, the audience applauded. The impression of the Colonel's being a good but somewhat dull little boy had conveyed itself to them, and, being child-lovers, they were kind. But

when the Colonel retired, and Madame Tiny tripped forth and began, with the shrillest and redest of soprano voices, accompanied with the most lavish of gestures, to give her famous imitations of music-hall "stars," the people grew bored and were rude. Jimmy felt himself growing scarlet with vicarious indignation as the poor little lady bowed and smiled, and pressed her infinitesimal gloved hand against her corsage in piteous manifestation of gratitude for the hisses and the cat-calls. . . . True, her squeaky little doll's voice, her mechanical doll's gestures, had appeared to him intolerable ; but . . . "The cowards ! the brutes !" he said between his teeth as Madame Tiny made her exit to the accompaniment of jeering laughter. And he got up and plunged out into the open air, treading recklessly and meriting the execrations which were lavished on his British head by the owners of Gallie toes upon which he had trodden.

He had formulated no definite intention of going round to the stage-door and sending in his name ; but he did this, nevertheless. An official in an enormous brass-bound hat, something between a pompier's helmet and a shako of the Old Guard, received the card, and glanced at Jimmy curiously (or Jimmy fancied that he did) before sending it in by a negro boy ; one of the ebony pages who had carried the imperial train of Miss Minota. It seemed a long time before the answer came back by word of mouth. M le Colonel entreated of Monsieur to make himself the trouble to drive at once to M. le Colonel's hotel, where Madame and M. le Colonel would, within a few minutes, have the happiness of meeting Monsieur.

As Jimmy signified his willingness to do as the Colonel desired, he was sensible of vexation. He had conquered his great repugnance, testified his willingness to meet his parents on their own level, within their own sphere, and had met with a rebuff instead of gratitude. It never

occurred to him, as he hailed a taxi-cab and rattled away to the appointed meeting-place, that, in attempting to thrust himself upon his poor little parents without previously warning them of the approach of so emotional a crisis, he had been grossly inconsiderate. It never dawned on him that his conduct had been wanting in delicacy and respect—never for an instant, although he had enjoyed all the advantages of a full-sized education. He was huffy and annoyed as he drove to the Colonel's hotel, which was a fashionable hostelry on a smart boulevard. He was shown into a handsome private sitting-room, with a lofty ceiling, gilded chandeliers, and smart upholsterings of pink velvet damask, and there to him entered very shortly the boyish little gentleman who had juggled with the cigars and candlesticks, leading by the hand the dollish little lady whose vocal efforts had caused Jimmy such tingling distress. Both were pale, dispirited, and red-eyed ; it was barely possible to disassociate them with the idea of children in disgrace. But the little Colonel spoke up bravely, holding a hand of nervous Madame Tiny in one of his own, and patting her shoulder with the other.

" My dear, this is our—our beloved son, as the Almighty in His mercy has permitted us to see—a grown-up, full-sized man. James, my dear son, this is your mother."

And as Jimmy, in painful embarrassment, hesitated, looking down upon the fluttered little lady from a height which had never until that moment caused him any inconvenience : " If you will kindly be seated," the Colonel added in his high, rather common, little boy's voice, " your mother will be better able to speak to you, I think."

Blushing furiously, Jimmy sat down in the indicated chair—a pink velvet thing with stout bow-legs. He was miserably conscious, and his sufferings were acute. The young father who finds himself for the first time subjected to the ordeal of dandling a baby under the watchful eyes

of his wife, his wife's mother, and the monthly nurse, tastes humiliation and knows himself to be but a clumsy creature. Jimmy had not the secret consolation of the young father ; which lies in the innate conviction that but for him there would be no baby. He sat there, a man of five feet eight inches, well-grown and muscular, in the presence of a creature so small and weak that he could have crushed her at his will. Yet his veins had been filled from the fountain of hers ; she had carried him under her bosom, and endured for him the pangs of birth. He was afraid to meet her eyes. He studied the pattern of the carpet as though life depended on his getting it by heart. And when she touched his open hand, he shivered uncontrollably ; perhaps because the touch was so slight and small and cold.

" If you was to bend down your head, my dear James," the Colonel said, struggling with something that sounded like catarrh, " your mother would be better able to—hem, ahem !—to kiss you, my boy ! "

" I beg your pardon !" said Jimmy. He stooped forward, scarlet to the tips of his ears, and Madame Tiny placed a timid little salute in the middle of his forehead. His father kissed him, too ; and then, as he sheepishly lifted up his head, he saw that both the little creatures were weeping. Their tearful excitement was shocking to him, in a way which he could not define.

" Please excuse us !" gasped Madame Tiny, dabbing her eyes with a laced pocket-handkerchief which might have been bought in the Lowther Arcade. " We don't wish to upset you ! We——" She relapsed into her pocket-handkerchief and became inaudible.

" Now, now, mother !" the Colonel said. He made a great pretence of having done with all emotion, and put his own pocket-handkerchief away as though he never meant to take it out again. And he got his wife a chair,

in which, small as it was, she sat with the points of her tiny buckled shoes dangling some inches above the carpet, which was swept by the lace-frilled train of her fashionable evening-dress, as she rocked herself and sobbed and dried her eyes in an hysterical passion of grief or joy, or both together, which would have been touching and appropriate in a woman of quite normal proportions. "Her nerves are rather overtired," the Colonel continued apologetically, glancing at Madame Tiny. "You may guess, or, perhaps, it hasn't occurred to you, that the last few days have been, for us both, days of suspense. Suspense and—and anxiety. But, whatever your decision had been, we—we was fully prepared to abide by it, my dear son! Mother, if you go on crying like that, I shall have to send for Hattie, I really shall!"

"Hattie?" The idea had never before occurred to Jimmy. Perhaps he was not the only offspring of the union before him. "Hattie?" he repeated awkwardly, glancing at the door.

"If your mother and myself rightly understood the line or two you wrote upon your card, you was present at to-day's performance," returned the Colonel. "Therefore, you enjoyed an opportunity of seeing Hattie—I should say, Miss Minota."

"The—the—" Jimmy was afraid to say "The giantess," because of the extreme comparison suggested by the word. The Colonel nodded.

"A fine girl, and as good a creature as ever stepped! She has a great affection for your mother—quite clings to her, having lost both parents in early youth. A young woman without natural protectors should have some other persons—as she can trust in and rely upon—to look up to," said the Colonel gravely, pulling one or two of the fluffy light hairs which grew upon the corners of his upper lip. "And we, with no children of our own about us—

we've got to feel as if Hattie Minota quite belonged to us. Haven't we, mother?"

"Indeed we have, Peter dear!"

Madame Tiny's sobs had subsided ; she had hidden away the Lowther Arcadian pocket-handkerchief, and smoothed the puckers out of her round, plain, sallow little face. She was still absurdly fluttered, and shy of her son ; her doll-like hands, adorned with superb rings, hovered about her tiny bosom like agitated butterflies if he so much as glanced at her, but there was no discounting the admiration that shone in her eyes whenever they might furtively dwell upon him. "He—he reminds me so of my brother William," she remarked, with a nervous little titter, as the Colonel intercepted one of these stolen regards. The Colonel turned to Jimmy.

"William Quincey—your mother's second brother—was six feet high."

"The Quinceys were all tall people!" added Madame Tiny.

"So were the Meggatts—as far back as the Meggatts go, and I suppose that takes us right away to Adam," said the Colonel proudly. "Not an undersized man or woman ever bore the name—but me! I am the only prodigy ever was known in my family ; and your mother is, similarly, the only prodigy ever was known in hers."

Jimmy's father, in his thin, boyish little voice, with its Cockney accent and American intonations, had told something that his son had burningly desired to know. A look of relief came into Jimmy's face as the Colonel slid down from his chair, and fetched, from a side-table, an immense, gilded photograph-album, which he brought to his son's knee, like an obliging child. It contained a collection of Meggatts and Quinceys, who certainly justified the statement regarding their size. To Uncle William, a large, bearded man who balanced his forefinger upon a broken

Corinthian column and wore a cabbage-tree hat, flanne l shirt, and thigh-boots, Jimmy certainly bore a faint family resemblance, such as exists between the pumpkin and the melon.

"William had that taken at the gold-diggings," volunteered Madame Tiny, in her shrill voice.

"He keeps a grocer's store in San Francisco now, the same as what your mother's father did. Your mother's Californian bred and born. As for me, I belong to the Old Country. My father was a glass-bender in Lambeth Road," said the Colonel, as Jimmy's long-cherished illusions with regard to the Meggatt family melted into air ; "show-cases, and so forth, was his trade. Perhaps," there was almost a twinkle in the Colonel's eye, "perhaps that's how I came to be part of a show myself. Eh, mother ?"

"Don't, father !" expostulated Madame Tiny, wrinkling her nose as though she were about to cry again.

"Your mother don't like the life—the travelling and the constant change," explained the Colonel, with a sagacious glance at Jimmy. "If you care to smoke before our early professional dinner—because you won't deny us the pleasure of having a meal together ?" said the little man pleasantly, pulling out of his breast-poecket a full-grown crocodile-leather case, handsomely mounted in gold, the same from which he had extracted the cigars with which he had previously juggled—"if you care to smoke before dinner, try one of these. Your mother doesn't object to tobacco, or she'd object to me ! Isn't that so, mother ?"

It never occurred to Jimmy, as he smiled at the Colonel's mild facetiousness, that the little gentleman's good spirits might have been assumed to cloak a tremulous distress arising from a keen appreciation of the impossibility of the situation. He accepted a cigar, which was both long and strong, and the Colonel, standing at his knee, gave him a light. During this proceeding, Jimmy was conscious of a

faint rustle and the opening and closing of a door, and when the blue, fragrant smoke cleared from before his vision, he saw that Madame Tiny had left the room.

" You'll make allowances for her," said the Colonel, following the direction of his son's eyes. " She has been over-excited, and she's a little upset. One must make allowances for a woman's feelings—and your mother isn't over-strong. You dropped upon us so suddenly that——" The Colonel's eyes rounded at the recollection.

" I ought to have written first," said Jimmy thickly. " I'm afraid . . . I believe I acted inconsiderately. I hope my mother——"

He stopped in a kind of miserable dismay ; but the Colonel beamed with delight. " Go on," he said, taking the large cigar out of his mouth to laugh more unrestrainedly. " Your mother . . . I wish she could have heard you say that—I really do ! Women think so much of these things." He slid down from his chair, his massive gold watch-chain with its jewelled charms, clanking, and his little silk socks revealed as before. " I'll show you something. Wait a minute !" He went out of the room into an adjoining chamber, the same into which Madame Tiny had vanished, and after a moment returned with a Russia-leather case. It was handsomely embossed, and fitted with a lock and key. It contained every portrait of Peter that had ever been taken, from the last, a highly polished and stippled specimen of the photographer's art, to the first, a faded presentment of a large, solemn baby grasping a rattle, and staring out into an untried world with round, speculative eyes. " Your mother's there, too," said the Colonel ; and, indeed, after some trouble, Peter detected the forehead and eyes of quite a girlish Madame Tiny peeping over a shoulder-knot of the large baby, two small hands clasped firmly round its solid waist, and a coquettish little foot pointing out from a wilderness of embroidered draperies.

" Your mother, when a girl, was a sweet, pretty little creature, and who should say it if not her husband ?" the Colonel went on, pulling at the large cigar. " Twenty-two years ago we met at the old Westminster Aquarium. There was a stage-spectacle, and I took the part of Sir Jeffrey Hudson—who was a person celebrated in English history, I've been given to understand. Your mother and me came out of a pie in a Royal Banquet that was at the end of the play, and, as my reward for doing something or another in connection with the rescue of a party who was in prison, King Charles united us in marriage. That spectacle had a run of twenty-five nights ; and on the last night, as we sat together in the pie a-waiting for the crust to be lifted up, I spoke !"

The Colonel's grammar became uncertain as his earnestness increased. Jimmy, staring at the childish figure perched on the edge of the high chair, at the ringed, elfin hand that flourished the big cigar, at the wizened forehead and the sunken pale-grey eyes, with dark half-circles under them as though the boy sat up too late, let his own cigar go out.

" I spoke. I told her as I couldn't bear to think of joining another show and leaving her ; that I knew her aunt, who travelled with her, wasn't over-kind. I said, perhaps for her and me—two lonely little creatures in a crowded world of big people—there might be a little world where everything was on a scale to match with ourselves, and pity and contempt and curiosity be quite shut out. She cried as if her heart would break, sitting there in the pie ; and then she put her hand into mine ; and we entered into possession of our new world from that night, twenty-two years ago."

The Colonel waved the smoke away from his eyes with his little, ringed hand, and coughed as if some of it had got into his throat.

" We got married quietly. The thing would have been made a nine-days' wonder of if it had spread about. We

joined a troupe—something like this—and saw foreign capitals. Your mother picked up languages wonderfully ; she'd been educated at a school. She writes a lovely hand. All our letters to you were wrote by your mother." Jimmy reealled the giant ealigraphy from which he had evolved that imaginary portrait of his father. " Then you dropped on us—almost before we knew ! and, though you were small enough at first, my boy, the rate at which you grew made me and your mother giddy. Then it broke on us that you belonged, not to our little world, but to the big world outside it ; that you never could be ours, except by your own election and choice ; that in keeping you with us we'd be doing you a cruel wrong, and that one day you might reproach us, justly, with our selfishness. So we made up our minds to part with you ; and if you'd seen the way your mother took it, how she grieved, and wouldn't show her grief for fear of grieving me . . . how she urged me on to take the step that trod on both our hearts and bruised 'em—you'd have allowed that a woman may be only three feet high, and still a heroine !"

The Colonel took out his handkerchief openly, and mopped his eyes and blew his nose. Then he went on :

" Your mother it was that wrote to Bastock. He'd acted as our Business Agent in negotiations with the managements of the English and foreign Variety Shows, and acted fairly. We were making a handsome income, and we'd money saved. We took Bastock into our seeret and told him our plan. Says your mother to Bastock : ' Our son is to be reared away from us, and ignorant of what we really are and how the world regards us, which knowledge would handicap him at the very start ! We mean our son to be brought up in a full-sized way. No checked developments, no warped opinions, no pigmy views, no stunted examples, are to hamper our son when he grows up—as we pray he may !—to be a properly de-

veloped man. Let him go to a great school where gentlemen's sons are bred and taught to be large-minded and chivalrous, and tender to the little and weak ! And when he is of an age to think and act for himself, when he becomes a large-minded, noble man, then let him know the truth ! and, looking down upon the father and mother, as it's the Almighty Will he never may look up to in this world,—perhaps he'll recognize that, whatever was mistaken in their views, whatever fell short and missed of the end they'd hoped and planned and worked for . . . no full-sized parents could have loved a child more dear, or sent him from them with more sorrowful hearts to the care of strangers!' Mother's very words, I assure you !" said the Colonel huskily.

Jimmy moved uneasily in his chair.

" So you went out of our little world into the big world," his father went on, " and grew and throve as we'd hoped you would. We'd christened you James—for me, with mother's surname after it, and we fell into a way between ourselves of calling you Full-Sized James. The time when Full-Sized James should come of age, and learn who his parents were, and what they meant in doing as they did by him : we always talked of that. And as it doesn't do to expect too much or count too greatly on having things go as you'd like 'em to—in this world !—we brought ourselves to look at our son's future without seeing ourselves in it, and to think of our own old age without him, seeing that he might, without ingratitude or baseness, prefer to drop us when he learned the truth. We arranged to give him a free hand, to make him independent of us, as far as our poor ability went, so that money shouldn't influence his decision, when he came to make it, and he might be free to take us or leave us—leave us or take us, just as he chose ! And if, instead of striking into the side-path that led our way, you'd gone on along the wide road that ends,

pray Heaven ! in fame and fortune for a young man with a full-sized body and a full-sized brain," said the Colonel, folding his small hands quietly upon his little knee, " your mother and me would never have reproached you—even in our thoughts. ' God bless our only child ! ' would have been our prayer, ' and keep and prosper him wherever he goes ! ' "

He freed his small right hand for a moment to wave it, as if bidding Jimmy farewell, and the gesture had so much of largeness in it that for the moment the Colonel appeared quite imposing in his dimensions. But the illusion passed, and Jimmy became aware that Madame Tiny had returned, and that an English-speaking waiter was announcing dinner.

" Please to take your mother, my dear son," said the Colonel briskly, getting down from his chair. And Jimmy, conscious that a grin was concealed behind the preternatural solemnity of the English-speaking waiter, led his diminutive hostess to the table.

## V

Three days were spent by the young man in the society of his parents, before a cause which shall be explained sent Jimmy back across the Channel. Had Fate in the person of Mr. Bastock not thus intervened, there is no knowing how or when Jimmy would have had the courage to break the net which seemed to be woven closer round him every hour. Gratitude, decency, common duty, were the meshes, and Jimmy chafed in spirit as they galled him. His parents had taken his impulse as a decision, his passing freak as an irretrievable step. They held it for granted that he had thrown in his lot with theirs ; he told himself that it would be base to do otherwise, infamous to requite their long solicitude, their tremulous care for him, their self-forgetting generosity and unselfishness, by deserting them ; and yet

he longed that it were possible to free himself from the assoeiation that was thraldom—to relieve himself of the sight and sound of them, at once and for ever, without forfeiting his own respect, without being brutal or base. One thing he had determined—he would not retain their money ! The moment it was possible to earn enough to keep body and soul together it should be returned. . . . And this very resolution proved to the Jimmy that sat within Jimmy, judging and condemning ; that in his heart he meant to abandon them, and would !

He grew thinner and lost colour in these three days, for he could not eat or sleep ; and his thoughts continually hovered, like dismal, slate-coloured birds, over the ruins of his future, in which Cissy Wade was to have played a prominent part ; but not in the rôle of a poor man's bride, for which Jimmy felt that she was not fitted. Would she wait until he, her lover, climbed to eminence and amassed fortune ? For a while Jimmy was quite sure that she would wait, rather enjoying the mystery which he firmly intended should surround his lapse from position,—his loss of fortune, the altered vista of his life. The secret of his birth Cissy should never hear—never ! To no mortal save Mr. Bastoek, whose discretion might be relied on, would he ever speak of Madame Tiny and the Colonel.

Meanwhile, the awful strangeness surrounding James the Full-Sized having rubbed off a little, Madame Tiny and the Colonel evinced a shy, wistful, tremulous affection for their son, and delight in his society. They loaded him with costly trinkets, which he dreaded to refuse ; they questioned him of the life which they had only shared in imagination, and of which they only knew through his letters, and drank in his replies with eager interest, exchanging solemn looks of wonder at his vast knowledge, and being moved to shrill, infantine laughter by his jests, for Jimmy laboured to seem natural and frank and gay.

He did not visit the Cirque again, but he encountered the manager of the Mignon troupe, who rejoiced in the name of Lochady, and turned out to be the moustached and dapper gentleman who nightly officiated as guide and interpreter for Miss Minota ; and to that colossal wonder, who occupied rooms in the hotel patronized by the Colonel and Madame Tiny, chiefly for the pleasure of being near her friends, he was formally introduced.

“ Oh my !—the gentleman who was so polite !” she exclaimed with a bashful giggle, when her large, round blue eyes descended to the level of Jimmy’s face. The story of the young man’s gallantry, which Miss Minota related with much detail, gave Jimmy’s parents ineffable pleasure. That he should prove chivalrous, a champion of the distressed—was this not one of the great results of a full-sized education ?

“ I guess you thought I acted like I was silly !” said the visitor.

She had dropped in to drink tea with Madame Tiny, and, taking off her hat, the plumes of which swept the ceiling and seriously imperilled the chandeliers, sat comfortably chatting upon the tallest and strongest sofa the apartment boasted. Seated thus, her large, round face was upon a level with Jimmy’s as he stood before her offering her a plate of foolish little sugar-cakes. But for the dull pallor of her fair complexion, reminiscent of suet-dumpling underdone, and a prevailing flabbiness, the result of insufficient exercise, Miss Minota would have been rather good-looking. She was well-proportioned in her huge way ; and if she had rather lumpy features, and her mouth especially might have lacked decision, she possessed cables of tow-coloured hair, and blue eyes as large as dolls’-saucers ; and the impression she gave was of being a kindly, honest, affectionate young woman, who, to be properly appreciated, ought to be looked at through the wrong end of an opera-glass.

Why, Jimmy asked, should he have thought Miss Minota silly ?

"Oh, well, because I was so seared," said Miss Minota, with a girlish giggle. "If there's one thing more than another I dasn't face, it's a boy ; and, you bet, boys know it, and lay along for me, the nasty little things !"

The large frame of Miss Minota was convulsed by a shudder, and the sofa creaked sympathetically.

"Hattie was always such a nervous girl !" said Madame Tiny, perched in a child's high chair before the tea-tray.

"It's constitutional," said Miss Minota, tossing her immense fair head, and drooping her large eyelids. "Madame there is as bold as a lion"—she indicated Madame Tiny, who was struggling with an adult teapot—"but I always was a shy thing. 'Way back home in Amurka people used to laff at me being so shy. Why, when they came to see me, I'd just run and hide ! And I've cried quarts—nights ;—beeause it seemed so lonesome to be bigger than 'nybody else. I tried to stop myself growin' by stintin' myself meals ; but I kep' on ; an' pore momma and poppa kep' on too, lettin' down my frocks and lettin' out my bed, until they'd let out all their patience, and poppa concluded it was time to let me out—or the house ! So I was hired out to Slater's travellin' Museum of Marvels, an' Dan Slater located me in a car'van with a coloured person to cook for me and do my chores. She was a real good soul ! But it wa'nt long till she was crowded out. Then Dan Slater telescoped two car'vans, and as one of 'em had been made for the giraffe, I got on pretty well. But we quarled soon after, Dan Slater and me." Miss Minota laughed a little, and the sofa creaked responsively.

"Oh, tell my—tell Mr. Meggatt that funny story !" cried Madame Tiny, pausing in her task of tea-making, with the sugar-tongs grasped in both hands.

"Well," said Miss Minota, with her ponderous drawl, "we were travellin' in the State of Minnesota—and that's how I got my professional name——"

"Her private name is Quilt—Miss Hattie Quilt, of Vermontsville, New Hampshire," explained the Colonel; "and 'Minota' is only 'Minnesota' with the middle dropped out."

"Dan's notion!" said Miss Minota, tossing her immense head, adorned with rope-like coils of whitey-yellow hair, and drooping her eyelids.

"Dan allowed Quilt was a mighty slack sort of name for a poster, and so I jest let him have his way. . . . He treated me like his own child—I will say that for Dan!—until we quarled an' he lawsuited me. . . . You see, we'd pitched in a little one-horse sort of town called Slocum, and the Popular Hall—where Dan set up his exhibits—was a mighty little place—there wa'n't room in it for me, let alone the other shows! An' by the time Dan started beatin' the drum, an' the folk began to roll up to the pay-place, with the truck they meant to trade off for tickets, I was jest faintin' for a breath of air. So I opened a winder—there was a row of 'em, about my own height from the ground—an' stuck my head out for a breathin'-spell. My! didn't the folk holler and stare! An' half of em' stopped outside an' didn't trade for tickets, because they'd seen me for nothin'. And Dan was real mad—and we had words—an' parted—an' Dan lawsuited poppa for seventy dollars, because he said I'd given the show away!"

"Did he win the case?" asked Jimmy.

But Miss Minota had reared her Alpine form from the sofa, and was taking her leave. "I only dropped in for a minute," she explained, as Madame Tiny exclaimed at the shortness of the visit. "Lochady has arranged for me to receive this afternoon. There's a dozen of 'em comin' to stare. Countesses an' Duchesses—an' Serene Highnesses

—an' things ! An' I guess I know what I've got to go through. They'll talk about me as ca'am—jest as if I wa'nt there ! an' they'll peek at me through their spy-glasses an' snigger till it's all flesh an' blood can do not to fly out at 'em !” said Miss Minota.

“ Hattie, Hattie, my dear !” expostulated Madame Tiny in motherly tones of reproof.

“ You're an angel !” said Miss Minota, with an emphatic nod that placed the chandeliers in greater jeopardy than ever ; “ and the best that can be said for me is that I've always known it ! and the sooner other people know it”—Jimmy fancied that her tone possessed a shade of personal acrimony—“ the better for them ! And I guess it's silly to quarl with my bread-and-butter. But I'm not made of iron, like the Eiffel Tower, an' I reckon I've my feelings. And if the temptation to take up a couple of those gigglin', peekin' women—an' squeeze 'em—an' drop 'em with all the conceit squoze right out of 'em, gets the better of me one of these days, it won't be for want of good advice !” She came down from the ceiling to kiss the little woman heartily. “ Good-bye, you best of dears !” said the affectionate girl. “ Au revore, Colonel—see you to-night ! Good-bye, Mr. Meggatt, in case we shouldn't meet again.” She engulfed in her vast palm the hand that Jimmy extended, and went away to receive the Countesses, Duchesses, Serene Highnesses, and things.

The Colonel saw her out with his usual politeness, and came back to Jimmy. He had been even more quiet than usual all day ; his brow wore painful puckers, and the dark circles under his tired little grey eyes looked as if the boy had been sitting up later than ever. He had his hand at the breast - pocket of his little tweed morning-coat, and when he said, “ I have had a letter from Mr. Bastock, my dear son,” it was plain that Bastock had disturbed him. Madame Tiny, too, was sitting in her high chair very

quietly, with her small hands folded on the edge of the tea-tray. The painful puckers of the Colonel's forehead were reflected upon hers, and her eyes strayed anxiously between her son and her husband.

"Bastock has told your mother and me," said the Colonel, bringing out the letter, "something which you thought it better not to confide to us."

Jimmy knew instantly what that was.

"There is a certain young lady," the Colonel went on, "a wealthy and beautiful young lady, into whose society you have been much thrown. An attachment has sprung up between you—it has resulted in an engagement. Bastock, who seems to hear everything, has heard this from Mr. Pawley Wotherspoon, who got his information from Miss Wade's brother, your fellow-student in the law."

The Colonel put back the letter in his pocket with an agitated hand.

"We don't blame you for keeping your secret to yourself, my dear son," he said, with lips that were curiously white and dry. "But the news has come upon us suddenly. Your mother and me have talked things over, and we feel bound to ask, 'Have you told this young lady who loves you—whom you have engaged yourself to marry—who and what your parents are?'"

Full-Sized James flushed a burning red from the white line of his collar to his forehead. He shook his head, looking high over the Colonel's at the opposite wall.

"There hasn't been much time, to be sure!" said the Colonel. ("But you can give us an answer to the question, 'When do you intend to tell her?' my dear son.")"

Jimmy found himself saying, in a small, thin voice that he had heard in Bastock's office, and which was curiously like the Colonel's, "I shall never tell her!"

"She must be told!"

It was Madame Tiny who had spoken, with sudden de-

cision and energy, pointing an infinitesimal finger sternly at Full-Sized James.

The profound absurdity of defending or excusing himself to a creature so small and childish, was patent to him even as he stammered, “It’s not possible! . . . I say, it’s not possible! . . . You don’t realize. . . . It couldn’t be done! She would—she would never—it would be the end of—of everything! Can’t you understand?” He choked.

“She must be told!” reiterated Madame Tiny shrilly, and without relaxing the stern, judicial finger. “Go and tell her! If you’re worthy of her love, go and tell her! If she’s worthy of yours, will she honour or despise you for doing what’s right? Even if she casts you off—breaks your heart, and mine with grief for you—go and tell her! What did we send you to that great school for, but to learn Truth and Honour—to grow to be a gentleman amongst gentlemen, instead of a dwarf amongst dwarfs? Go and tell her, and then,” cried the tiny creature, clasping her hands, while the tears ran down her face, “and then, my poor, poor boy! we’ll ask your pardon and hers—upon our bended knees!”

“Mother!” cried the Colonel, as Madame Tiny fell out of her high child’s chair into his arms; “Mother!”

“Father!” cried the little creature, clinging to him; “something came home to me with such a flash as I set there just now. We’ve wronged our boy instead of righting him; we’ve been cruel where we meant to be most kind. With all our love and care, we’ve laid up for him—and for the child of other parents—disappointment and grief and shame! What were two little things like us about to set ourselves against Fate? How blind we’ve been, my dear, my dear! when we thought ourselves most far-seeing! And it’s me—it’s me that brought it all about from the very beginning! Oh, my husband!” cried Madame Tiny,

wringing her hands ; “ oh, my husband, what have I done ?”

She was moaning and rocking herself upon the Colonel’s breast in quite a desperate agony of self-reproachful grief as Jimmy shrank out of the room. When, on reaching the lower vestibule, he found that he had forgotten his hat, and stole back for it, it was to find the two little creatures who had brought him into the world still entwined and sobbing in the chair he had recently vacated ; and looking, in the midst of a forest of tall furniture, like a pair of middle aged Babes in the Wood. So Full-Sized James did not fetch his hat after all, but crept away again and sent a waiter for it ; and left Paris by the night train, and called upon Mr. Bastock in his office near the Strand immediately upon his arrival in London.

“ I’m to promise never to tell, that’s what you want ?” said the shrewd little man. “ And, after keeping a secret for twenty-one years, it ought to be easy to keep it for another twenty. But your mother was right in advising you to take the young lady into your confidence. I’ve seen too much of life not to know that reserved facts leak out, my boy—leak out ; and worse breaches are caused by ‘ sparing people pain,’ as people are fond of calling that sort of selfishness, than ever were made by telling the truth. However, it’s not my business !” And, with his mind thus relieved, Jimmy went back to his chambers in Student’s Inn Court and his legal studies under Mr. Pawley Wotherspoon.

And in June Cissy and Mrs. Wade came up to town. They would go about a great deal, and Jimmy went with them, carrying his sick heart into galleries, theatres, shops—all sorts of lively places where full-sized people amused themselves. The mothers and sisters of men he had known at Harrow, prompted by their male relatives, were kind to him, and his chimney-glass was fringed with cards of invitation to smart houses. But, wherever he might go, he was

not at ease ; his manner was jerky, his glance unsteady. The secret he carried in his bosom wore away his flesh. He grew moody, absent, and shy. People left off finding Jimmy Meggatt a delightful young fellow !

He was almost the old Jimmy when alone with Cissy, until the sharp suspicion that she might discover, without any revelation upon his part, what he so fiercely desired to keep unknown, began to haunt him. All these weeks he had not written to Paris ; he had not received any letter ; he did not know whether the Marvellous Mignons were still fulfilling their engagement at the Cirque, or whether they had taken wing elsewhere. He was devoured by the suspicion that the Colonel might write to Mrs. Wade ; that Madame Tiny, in her passion for candour, might communicate with Cissy. He lived upon thorns, cherishing this dread. The agony he suffered was pitiable. He ground his teeth sometimes to keep himself from shrieking out the truth, the horrible truth, which would kill Cissy's love with one lightning-stroke, and leave him desolate among his many friends.

And so the weeks spun on, and he had got, without knowing it, through some three hundred of the five thousand pounds. When he realized this, he had some moments of self-contempt, and spurred himself to superhuman efforts of reading under Mr. Pawley Wotherspoon. But he soon relapsed into his old occupation of waiting and watching, watching and waiting, for the dawning of that look of cold, repelling fear, contempt, dislike, in Cissy's eyes.

" Why do you look at me so often as if you expected me to turn into somebody else ? " Cissy asked once.

Jimmy would have put her off with some lover-like platitude about a fairy or an angel, but Cissy shook her pretty head soberly, twisting a button of his coat.

" You're always asking me if I ' still care ' to do this, or whether I ' still like ' to have that. You seemed actually

to doubt, the other day, whether I really kept your letters ? You came back three times afterwards to say ‘ Good-night,’ and I want to ask you a question.”

“ Yes ?” Jimmy would have liked to shut his eyes. But he faced the expected knife-thrust.

“ Jimmy dear, when you went to see your people in Paris, did you tell them—about our engagement ?”

“ They learned of it,” said Jimmy, with an awful effort, “ after a little while.”

“ Were they—Colonel and Mrs. Meggatt—pleased ?” Cissy asked, twirling a rose Jimmy had given her between her slim white fingers and blushing like a rose herself. “ Or—I have sometimes fancied—didn’t they like it ?”

“ Why should they not be pleased ? Why should they not like it ?” asked Jimmy hardily.

“ Because ”—Cissy rubbed her soft cheek against his arm and hesitated—“ because, after all, father was a tradesman ! . . . Not that I am ashamed of that”—she straightened her white throat proudly. “ But still, the Wades, as far back as the Wades go, have all wrapped things up in paper and tied them round with string, and taken money for them over a counter, whether they did these things themselves or paid other people to do them. And it occurred to me that Colonel Meggatt might think that you—that you were disgracing your family and marrying beneath you in marrying me !”

Jimmy was vividly conscious at that moment of the exact social position occupied by the family to which Cissy referred. He stared at the reflection of his face in the glass over Cissy’s bronze-coloured hair, and there were painful puckers about his brow, and black circles under his eyes which reminded him of the Colonel. He grasped his own character in that moment as he had never done, realizing the indecision, irritability, weakness, of that reflected face.

He developed thenceforth that symptom indicative of

the oppressed conscience or the perplexed mind which seeks relief in putting to persons—for preference, strangers who appear sagacious,—hypothetical cases resembling its own. Thus, on being introduced by a friend, at whose table he was dining, to a great and celebrated surgeon, who was also a Professor of Physiology, he put, with an intensely unreal effect of being haphazard and undesigned, and with a laboured pretence of having read the story in a newspaper, the case to him.

“An uncomfortable position, certainly,” said the great man, who was so great that, when he said anything, other people nearly left off talking to listen. He had an odd, drawling hesitation in his speech, which can only be conveyed by the writer with difficulty. “Unpleasant discovery for the—arah!—for the young man! Resulting in difficulties to cope with which would require more—arah!—intellectual power, will,—arah!—good-feeling and conscientiousness, than the young man would—arah!—be likely to possess.”

“Dwarfs are brainy little beggars, as a rule!” said a man sitting near, for the ladies had, according to the old-fashioned usage in vogue at this particular house, left the table. “Why shouldn’t the full-sized son of a dwarf be as brainy as his father? And the young fellow has been brought up among ordinary people—nothing in his surroundings to stunt his ideas, and so forth, I take it?”

The distinguished surgeon lifted his grey, bushy eyebrows to glance over his gold-rimmed glasses, and turned his chair carefully in the direction of the speaker. “On the—arah!—contrary, there has been everything in his surroundings and the influences brought to bear upon him—from childhood to—arah!—manhood—that could contribute to stunt his mental developments and warp his mind. He has been brought up to consider nobody but himself; he has imbibed the prejudices, as he has acquired the manners, of a class to

which he does not belong ; no—arah !—human creature has claimed from him—arah !—affection, or sympathy, or consideration, or self-sacrifice ! He is—arah !—bound by no natural ties or homely associations. Self is the pinnacle on which he stands ; self the horizon that bounds his—arah !—outlook ; he is the be-all and end-all of his own narrow existence. Better for the—arah !—young man to have been bred amongst dwarfs, to have lived amongst them, and—arah !—learned to think and feel, and—arah !—love and suffer, with dwarfs ; than to have attained to the physical stature of ordinary manhood, and remained, in heart, and mind, and soul, a pigmy !”

“ To think and feel, and love and suffer, amongst dwarfs,” quoted the man who had spoken before. “ I suppose they do, you know, all that ? But I don’t envy the unfortunate chap his family-tree ! Although I’ve seen an oak three hundred years old growing in a Japanese flower-pot.”

Jimmy, very pale, referred to the question of the unfortunate young man’s engagement. Would he be justified in keeping the secret of his parentage from the lady ?

“ If he does—he’s what I call a sweep !” said the man who had spoken before, with great plainness.

“ If he does, he will be acting exactly as a young man of his moral calibre might be expected to act,” said the man of science. “ He will be true to himself, if not—arah !—strictly honourable to the—arah !—young lady.”

The man who had spoken before grunted, and Jimmy passionately hated him. But he took leave with all the ease he could command, as he had an engagement to take some ladies to the theatre. When he had gone, the man who had grunted said, as he filled his glass, “ I wonder, now, if that was a real case or a faked-up newspaper story ?”

And the distinguished surgeon said, as he snipped off the end of a fresh cigar, “ Oh yes ! it was a real case. It—arah !—was his own !”

"Good God!" cried the other man. "How do you know it?"

"His frightened eyes betrayed him," said the great surgeon, "and his hands. Didn't you observe them twitching on the table-cloth, shading his eyes, sheltering his mouth, as we talked? Delicate little hands women admire and pay him compliments about, I have no doubt. But they're hands that tell their story—at least, to a scientific observer." He drank his liqueur thoughtfully.

"So Meggatt's parents are circus-dwarfs!" said the other man. "He's been bred and educated as a gentleman. I wonder will he pluck up and tell the truth to that girl he's going to marry, in spite of all?"

He very nearly did tell her, in the softly-lighted drawing-room, as he and she sat together, waiting while Mrs. Wade put on her opera-cloak. But he hesitated, and was lost—or saved. Then Mrs. Wade joined the young people, and they got into the hired brougham, and she said to Jimmy: "Tell the coachman to drive to the Theatre of Equitation, near Leicester Square."

Jimmy's ears burned.

"You are going——?"

"To the Circus!" said Cissy, with a happy little laugh. "I didn't tell you before, because I don't believe you like circuses. But you can't help yourself. We're unprotected females, and you have to take us—or be rude and say you won't go!"

Indeed, Jimmy longed to say that. But he gave the coachman the direction and got meekly into the carriage. The Theatre of Equitation was very like the Paris place, with its equine groups of statuary, its immense painted dome; the changing numbers in a glaring round glass eye that signified the different turns; the upholstery, the gilding, the blaze of light, and the throng of people. Their seats were in the stalls, three rows from the ring. The perform-

ance had long ago commenced. Jimmy took the programme an attendant offered, glanced at it, and leaned back in his seat, sick at heart, for the Marvellous Mignons were billed to appear. There was no escaping Fate ; the miniature gilded coaches, drawn by their diminutive steeds, were at that moment driven into the ring. The Mignons got out ; there was the Colonel ; there was Madame Tiny. . . .

"What odd little creatures !" cried Cissy in a gay aside to Jimmy, who made a sound in response. He was waiting, waiting for the awful moment when the whole troupe of the dwarfs, arm-in-arm, should pass, as was their custom, in procession round the ring. He saw them lifted up like dolls by their attendants ; he would have seen them if he had shut his eyes. Twenty times the idea of escaping—of getting up and rushing away—occurred to him in as many seconds. But he had no strength to carry it out. The springs of life were low in him, and he only sat and waited as his Fate drew near. The chorus of comments—admiring, pitying, jeering—rose up as the little people promenaded past, smiling and bowing, the big-headed little man with the wizened face escorting the deformed little lady ; another couple, and yet another couple ; then Madame Tiny on the Colonel's arm.

The dwarfs passed by ; the ordeal was over. Jimmy knew that his father and mother had seen him ; that they guessed who his companion must be. Both had looked at him as they went by, with sorrowful, questioning, appealing faces. He knew that he had summoned up the desperate courage to meet their look with the hard, indifferent stare of a stranger, and that what he had done could never be explained or undone ; that he was an outcast by his own deed from the community of honourable men, a thing to be despised, a traitor and a coward ! Did the Colonel think so as he stood before his little table juggling with the china

candlestick and the lighted candles ? He bungled nearly all his tricks, and Madame Tiny did not appear to give her celebrated imitations from the music-halls. An apology was made for her by the dapper Lochady ; the heat had affected Madame with faintness, he explained. And the performance came to an end with a display of fireworks and a Grand Water Carnival in the flooded arena, and Jimmy took Cissy and her mother away, and put them in their carriage, and slunk home to his chambers in the Temple, feeling dull, and lonely, and preternaturally old. He could not go to bed. To lie there in the dark remembering would have been too ghastly : so he lighted his fire and sat over the crackling blaze until the coals burned red and showed him pictures in them—small wizened faces, like those of children precociously grown old ; sorrowful, appealing, shocked, like the faces that had turned upon him as the dwarfs went by. . . .

“ God bless Full-Sized James, wherever he goes ! ” the Colonel had said. It was an infinitely little James, a mere midge compared with the Colonel, who had demonstrated that night which way he meant to go ; who had lived and thriven on the bounty of the hapless little creatures who had given him life ; who had taken their gifts and spoken them fair, and denied them and cast them off.

Pride had died in Jimmy that day in Bastock’s office, but vanity and self-esteem had lived, to get their death-blow from the distinguished surgeon in the after-dinner conversation of a few hours before. They died during this lonely night of vigils ; and, as Jimmy surveyed their corpses by the faint glow of the dying embers, and streaks of daylight began to outline the window-blinds, there was a hollow rumbling of wheels down in the flagged court below. After a moment, the bell rang, and there was a great knocking. He got up and threw open his window and leaned out. The sky, framed by the square of high roofs and tall chim-

neys, was a grey-white emptiness fearful to see ; the pale stars burned coldly behind black crape-like veils of vapour, and the cold breath blew upon him that is the sigh of this sad world when it awakens to yet another day.

There was a four-wheeled cab in Student's Inn Court, and a cabman in wet oilskins—for it had rained—was pounding at the outer door.

"What is it ? Who do you want ?" called Jimmy, craning his neck over the window-sill.

"There's somefink or someone in my keb—blest if I know which !" the cabman called back huskily, "a-wantin' a party of the name of Meggatt, as lives at Number Five."

"It's me—I'll come !" said Jimmy, and he ran downstairs, unfastened the door, and stepped forth into the chill dawning.

"Oh my, there he is !" cried a voice from the cab—a mooing, plaintive voice Jimmy had heard before. He tried to look into the cab, but it was full of something. He opened the cab-door, and, after a vast upheaval, little by little from the interior of the vehicle emerged the overwhelming personality of Miss Minota.

It was a wonder that a bulk so vast could ever have been stowed into so small a space, and the cabman seemed to feel it bitterly as he looked into the vehicle and out again at his fare, who stood upon the damp flagstones sobbing bitterly, with a handkerchief held to her eyes.

"What has happened——?" Jimmy was beginning, when Miss Minota put away the handkerchief and lowered upon him moist, indignant eyes.

"You may well ask," sobbed the giantess, "with me a-driving through these dreadful streets in a thing no bigger than a Saratoga on wheels, and lookin' out at street-corners swarming with nasty little boys, to ask my way to Mr. James Meggatt's chambers !" Tears as big as hailstones rolled down her large, pale cheeks; she was genuine in her

emotion and her grief. "But there was no one else to come! For I wouldn't, not for a crown of stars, hear of the Colonel leavin' the bed where that best and gentlest of tender hearts—thanks to the ingratitude of a certain person I'd shake for half-a-cent—is lying broken!"

"Is my mother—ill?" asked Jimmy, without the slightest doubt as to the cause.

"Is she sick? Well she may be!" cried the wrathful Miss Minota. "With such a son as she's got, I guess it 'ud be a wonder if she wa'nt! But if them that has a right to be a comfort to her turns against her, an' wounds her loving soul to death, I'll risk it but what I'll have 'em down upon their bended knees to beg her pardon before she goes out of this mean, mean world into one that's good enough for her if angels live in it! So get into that hack, you wretched little crittur', and come right back to her along with me!"

In the mighty grasp of Miss Minota, Jimmy was impelled towards the cab, as the coachman, who had hitherto nursed a sense of injury in silence, placed himself before the open door.

"Oh no, you don't—not *much!*" he said sarcastically. "I've 'ad enough, and so 'as my 'orse. Wot I drives is a keb—that's what it is—an' not a bloomin' kerryvan; so pay me my fare—a dollar an' a 'arf won't stand me in near wot you've took out o' the animal and the machine, and let me go 'ome to the Mews."

"I guess I'll pay you when you drop me and this gentleman at the hotel, you rude old person!" said Miss Minota sternly, "and not before!" She advanced upon the cabman, and he hastily abandoned the argument and climbed upon his box again, Jimmy, at Miss Minota's direction, getting up beside him. The cabman's eyes were bulging with suppressed indignation, and his complexion was of apoplectic purple, but he restrained the vocal expression

of his feelings, even when Miss Minota leaned her elbow upon the roof of the cab and again told him where to go. They went very slowly, and Jimmy could not feel as if the whole thing were anything but a dream, the familiar streets creeping by in the grey morning light, the horse's back moving up and down, and the giantess, as he saw her whenever he glanced back through the rattling front-window, sitting on the floor of the vehicle with her head jammed against the roof and her knees in painful juxtaposition with her chin, nodding at him whenever he caught her tearful eye, and rapping on the glass to cry out, "Hurry, Hurry!"

And then the cab stopped at a great building near the embankment, and Jimmy was paying the cabman, whose feelings had now found relief in profanity, and Miss Minota, looking quite small, was standing under the archway of a lofty, dimly-lighted vestibule, beckoning him to hurry—always to hurry!

"Madame was always puny, though she showed such a spirit," she said, leading the way upstairs. "Me an' the Colonel knew that, though we hadn't no idee she had a heart-complaint till a doctor was called in in Paris, quite lately, to attend her in a faintin' spell, and told us she might never rally from the next one—jest as ca'am. . . . An' last night," said Miss Minota, with a heaving breast, turning to confront Jimmy on an upper landing, "I guess you know what happened last night! Flesh-and-blood is flesh-and-blood, and we all have our weak spots; an' love's a thing there's no reckonin' with, as I found out myself when a young man in N'York, a clerk in a dry-goods store, proposed to smuggle me out of Kneeman's Star Circus by the back-way and elope with me on the cars! But I guess there don't go considerable of a blessin' in gettin' a thing you've wanted—not if you've stood upon your mother's heart to reach it!"

She said all this at railroad speed, in a white heat of grief

and indignation, and without pausing in the long, swift strides that covered so many stairs, while Jimmy plodded patiently behind. It was a relief to him to be rated ; he did not hear the accusing voice in his own heart while Miss Minota's was raised in condemnation. And then they were in a large bedroom, where, in a great bed, under a huge, lace-draped canopy, Madame Tiny lay, with the Colonel, red-eyed and disconsolate, perched by her side. He merely looked up as his son came in, and then only to shake his head, and frame with his lips the words that found their silent echo in the tiny wizened faee within the bed :

“ No hope ! Sinking fast !”

Jimmy was conscious of a curious drowning sensation, and the room, with its occupants, the vast bed, and the still little creature in it, spun round and round. But the huge grasp he had felt before was on his shoulder, and Miss Minota's large faee loomed threateningly over him as she whispered in his ear :

“ If your mother's dyin', she's got to die happy ! She's sorrowed an' longed and grieved most of her life. She's a-goin' to die happy now if I'm a sinner for ever ! Don't you dast to contradict me—whatever I say ! Act up and lie—you little crittur, you !—if you call yourself a Christian man !”

She went down upon her knees to bend over the childlike figure in the great bed, and the tears splashed upon the pillows like the forerunners of a thunder-shower.

“ Oh, my best and tenderest of friends and mothers !” cried Miss Minota. “ He's here ! He's come baek to you, your boy as you've loved so dear, an' bore so much for—sorry, an' grateful, an' repentant, an' lovin', an' all as he should be ! An' he's acted straight an' honest, an' told the truth to that young lady, an' she says it don't make a mite of differencee, an' any son might be proud of such a mother ! That's her message ! And she'd have come to bring it

herself, but she guessed you'd think she intruded—not bein' properly introduced ! . . . Back me up !" she ordered Jimmy with her eyes, as Madame Tiny's eyes opened, and a smile fluttered about the corners of her faded little lips. " Say as I say !"

And Jimmy said, like a child repeating a lesson : " It doesn't make a bit of difference. And any son might be proud of such a——"

Something plucked at his heart. The tears burst from his eyes. He tried vainly to articulate the word those wistful eyes besought from him, and choked, and fell upon his knees beside the bed. Something very light and small touched and rested on his head.

" God bless Full-Sized James " said the merest thread of a voice, " and his dear wife—wherever they go !" And Madame Tiny very quietly and unobtrusively departed.

Upon a certain night, not long after, the Colonel said, shaking his son's hand, as they stood together upon the platform at Euston Station before the starting of the Liverpool steamer-train. " Good-bye, my dear son. You have been a great comfort to me since your dear mother——." The little gentleman glanced down at his mourning-clothes and up at his son, and the circles round the boy's eyes were deeper than ever. He dropped something on the platform as he felt for his handkerchief, and a passing stranger, picking up the glove, handed it to Jimmy, saying : " Pardon me, but your little brother . . ." The stranger caught the Colonel's eye, and evaporated with an incoherent apology as the Colonel said :

" I take Hattie across to New York with me. As you know, me and her have settled to exhibit together, and so I sever our—my connection with the Mignon Troupe for good. Lochady approves of the idea, which was Hattie's, as you have heard. . . . She is a good, tender-hearted girl, and no father could wish a more devoted daughter than she has

been to me ever since . . ." His eye reverted to his black clothes. "It's a pretty cemetery, Norwood," the Colonel continued, "and the monument is a handsome one, and full-sized, as mother would have wished. . . . You'll go there sometimes, my dear son ?"

They had gone there together that morning with Cissy. As they grasped hands, the Colonel said, missing her, "Where is Miss Wade ?"

She was in the saloon-carriage specially retained for the use of Miss Minota, bidding an affectionate good-bye to that tender-hearted creature, who was crying behind her vast crape veil.

"I'll feel more content to leave *her*, lying so quiet there, and less guilty in my conscience, for knowin' that what I told the dear soul wa'n't a real lie, but a kind of beforehand truth!" said Miss Minota. "An', if I grieve for her more'n her own son—who couldn't be expected to fret so much, not knowin' her as I did—I hope she'll forgive me. I'm that mussed up with cryin' I dasn't look out of the winder to bid Mr. Meggatt good-bye; but I guess he won't bear me any gretch for the names I called him. When I've thought what a dretful forward thing it was of me—goin' to a gentleman's apartments in the middle of the night—I tremble all over, I really do! Good-bye, dear, again. . . . I shall damp you all off if I kiss you, I guess! There's the locomotive whistlin'! Oh Lawd! Colonel, ain't you comin' in? Suppose the ears was to slide off and leave you I should be seared out of my life! . . . A girl wants protection travellin'," said Miss Minota.

## XXII

### A NEW LEAF

THE Honourable Edward Fulke Coppering Wilberbridge, not very long before gazetted a dandy Lieutenant of the Light Cavalry Regiment, known outside the Army List as the "Strawberry Roan Dragoons"—the Hon. Edward had been paternally advised by his Colonel to seek change of air and scene—not upon the gambling northern seaboard of the Mediterranean or the electric-lighted boulevards of Paris, but somewhere abroad—until old Lord Mangold of Wurzels, a Right Honourable Privy Councillor of strict morals and acid constitution, should have got over an attack of righteous indignation, induced by disgust at the irregularities of his nearest relative, and the prematurely grey-headed trustees of the Hon. Edward's late father's will should have raised the wind sufficiently to settle an unusually thick crop of racing debts.

The Hon. Edward, pledged to turn over the first new leaf of an unbroken series by conducting himself with the strictest propriety while away on leave, found himself within eight days upon a Hungarian racecourse. Much of the rustle had been taken out of the Lieutenant by his January failures at Nottingham, Newbury, and Kempton Park, but a man's ruling passion is stronger than the man, and a racecourse, even in Eastern Europe, is better—in the opinion of a young gentleman as passionately devoted to the chase as was this one—than none at all. The horses were miserable screws, oddly caparisoned, and flogged by elementary jockeys with heavily-plaited leather whips.

Jews in black silk gaberdines, side-curls, and inverted chimney-pot hats, gave and took the odds in the depreciated silver florin and the copper kreutzer, under gigantic blue-and-yellow silk umbrellas. Gipsies, pedlars, and riff-raff of all hues and descriptions, mingled with the crowds of festively-attired townsfolk and peasantry ; and the Honourable Edward was fain to acknowledge that if the horseflesh was below par, the dreamy, dark-eyed, classically-featured Roumanian and Magyar women in their rich and picturesque costumes were well worth looking at.

Standing on the box of a dilapidated pair-horse waggonette, his well-set-up, athletic figure attired in tweeds, knickers, and gaiters of the most recent sporting fashion, his green Tyrolean hat, a jay's blue wing-feather in the band of it, pushed well to the back of his head, his racing-glass glued to his eyes, the Honourable Edward, as a foreigner of apparent social condition, and obvious good looks, commanded a fair share of feminine attention. The third event of the day had ended grotesquely in a collision at the post, and a rough-and-tumble fight, in which jockeys, owners, and judges, indiscriminately took part. The police looked upon the fray with languid interest, the crowd seethed and bubbled, while the spectators in the Grand Stand tranquilly turned their attention to lunch. To picnic all alone in a rickety waggonette upon a racecourse crowded with jovial parties is not a rollicking experience. The Honourable Edward shrugged as he got out his travelling-flask and sandwich-box. The driver, a broad-faced, cheery Magyar, was already deep in the mysteries of a greasy parcel containing cubes of pork fat, red-peppered, and hunks of caraway-seed bread.

“Chap can't help looking rummy and foreign if he lives on queer grub like that—what ?” reflected the Honourable Edward. “Wonder what the landlady of the Polzvar Hotel has put up for me.”

It turned out that she had put up sandwiches of the same kind of caraway-seed bread as the driver was then eating, with thin slices of the same pork fat, hotly red-peppered, between them. The Honourable Edward, with a full-bodied expression of disgust, emptied the sandwich-box upon the grass, and got down to go and look for something wherewith to fill the vacuum behind the middle buttons of his waistcoat.

"Angol Baratan, pardon the liberty . . ."

"Eh, what?" said the Honourable Edward.

He turned to confront a long, lean, spikily-moustached, rather too perfectly well-dressed man in grey clothes, with a lemon-coloured necktie and a very red nose.

"The ladies in the English motor-ear over yonder," said the well-dressed, red-nosed man, with a graceful sweep of a grey chimney-pot hat, "have constituted me their ambassador to the English gentleman who honours our local racecourse with his presence. They observed the little episode in connection with your sandwich-case just now, and they beg you to join them at lunch. Permit me to point them out to you—there, a little to the left of the Grand Stand."

The Honourable Edward's eye followed the cane with which the red-nosed, English-speaking gentleman indicated the locality where hospitality waited. Then it was quenched, with its fellow, in tears of suppressed mirth. Two ladies in the national costume occupied the back seat of a large, handsome, landau-bodiced "Flyaway" of about twenty-five horse-power. Hampers were being opened by liveried servants; a white-gloved hand beckoned the gentlemen to approach.

"I observe you smile," said the red-nosed elderly gentleman, as the Honourable Edward, shaking with suppressed guffaws, mopped his tearful eyes. "No, it is not even in this country the fashion to harness horses to motor-ears,

though, as you perceive, four bay nags are attached to our vehicle. The fact is, it only arrived from England yesterday ; the chauffeur who was to have accompanied it is ill with influenza, and nobody upon our estate, not even myself, who should have mastered its working long ago, knows enough of the machine to drive it. Our ladies are impulsive—they had promised all their female friends that they would attend the Polzvar Races in an English automobile. And, with the assistance of the horses that usually draw the britzchka, they have kept their word.” He waved a grey *suède* glove gracefully. “Come, let us join them !” said he urbanely.

The Honourable Edward made an excellent luncheon. There were ham in Madeira and truffled chicken ; there were mayonnaise of salmon and fruit salad, dry champagne and mellow Tokay ; and the smiles of beauty were not wanting to the banquet. Enlivened by generous food, warmed by capital wine, and soothed by irreproachable tobacco, the Honourable Edward put down his host as a Magyar noble and magnate of hospitable turn. He had introduced himself as “Polkiegraez, at your service,” the ladies as his sister Ilona and his daughter Florizan. Their rich costumes of stiff and vari-coloured silks, covered with antique embroidery and adorned with unique jewellery, their coquettish head-dresses, long thick plaits of silken black hair, adorned with gold and silver coins, their bright-red leather top-boots, set them off to perfection. Everything about them denoted lavish expenditure. Even the heavy furs they had thrown aside were of magnificent sable, and the rings adorning the white hands of the aunt and niece were jewels a princess would not have disdained. They spoke no English, but French with a strong Hungarian accent, and both were very, very kind to the young English stranger.

“Of course the polite old buffer is a Count,” thought the

Honourable Edward ; "everybody above the rank of a pork-butcher is a noble in Hungary, I've heard, and the sister and the niece are so uncommonly fetching that if they aren't Countesses they ought to be !"

"Yes," he said aloud in the open-vowelled French that was as distinctive of Eton as the undone bottom button of his waistcoat. "I made to enjoy the races very well. Possibly more, if the cattle were not invalids so near the sausage-factory ; in my country we despatch them there before they become too much of cripples to go at all. But every country has its customs—that goes without saying. Bet ! No, I'm pledged not to bet just now, Countess, and, besides, your florins frighten me. If I tried to plank my pot in pennies at home, I should feel the same. Do you comprehend ?"

Countess Florizan said she comprehended perfectly. She sympathized with the young Englishman, so far from all he held dear, and as she did it she sighed. Such beautiful, velvety-black eyes in conjunction with so divinely red a mouth and such a peachy skin the Honourable Edward had never before encountered. She was as tall and strong and supple as goddesses when they lived on earth, and upon the new leaf that Teddy had turned over he began to read prophecies for the future that made him think. There might be something better in life, he began to feel, than bridge, huntin', and racin'. How the regiment would open its eyes, how society would stare, if he, Edward Falke Coppingher Wilberbridge, were to bring home a wife like the Countess Florizan as captive of his bow and spear ! Everything about her spoke of riches ; even the chain of diamonds and rubies she sported in the daytime—a Hungarian habit, he presumed—were a dower in themselves. Surely the crochety old Privy Councillor would not object to such a life-partner for the future Lord Mangold of Wurzels ? And Polkiegracz was undoubtedly a person of consequence in Polzvar, judging by the attention he excited on the course.

Racing-glasses followed every movement of his or the ladies, heads nodded as people whispered together, and moustached Hungarian nobles and elegant Hungarian ladies bowed in response to the sweep of his grey, chimney-pot hat.

"Father, the Angol Baratan thinks our motor-car a fine one," said Countess Florizan, showing her dazzling teeth.

"Indeed? I am delighted," observed the genial Polkiegracz. "It cost me a thousand of your English sovereigns," he said, twirling his spiky moustache, and grinning at the Honourable Edward. "I will not frighten you by stating the amount in florins, ha, ha! Please the Saints! we shall find it a great assistance to us in this country, where rapid movement expedites business. Does it not, my treasures?"

"Yes, indeed," sighed the Countess Ilona.

"It is a thousand pities that the English chauffeur has influenza and cannot drive," said the Countess Florizan, transfixing the susceptible young officer with a shaft from her wonderful eyes. "We might have combined pleasure with profit in our visit to the races to-day."

"You do not bet, I understand, Count?" said the Honourable Edward to the polite Polkiegracz.

"No, no, Angol Baratan, I am no gambler. It suffices me to see other people win," said the courteous Count. "You observe the party on the very handsome yellow coach there, with a team of blacks, the finest horses in the country. Well, the Chief of the Polzvar Police Bureau, that agreeable individual in official uniform who spoke to me just now, tells me that Prince Stepan Kutzokzi, its owner, has just won a sum of fifty thousand florins, which he has, moreover, been paid. And that one or two gentlemen of his party have been nearly as fortunate."

"Heavens, beloved father mine!" cried the Countess Florizan. "What a haul! Ah, if the English chauffeur were only here, we might show Prince Stepan that the

famous team of blacks on which he prides himself are broken-down donkeys compared to an English motor-car. Angol Baratan," she cried, turning to the enamoured Lieutenant, "you told us just now that you thoroughly understood the working of a machine like this. Could you not—could you not——?"

The Honourable Edward did not need to be implored twice in such a tone and with such a look from such a young woman as the Countess Florizan.

"I'll do my best, Countess," he said, blushing a beautiful poppy hue. "If the tyres are all right, and there's petrol in the tank, I don't see why I shouldn't drive you home."

They unharnessed the bay horses, whose impromptu rope-tackle had tickled the Honourable Edward's sense of humour, and the young English officer overhauled the machine. All was in good order, and ere the close of the final event upon the racing-card the chuff-chuff of the awakened engine sent throbs of rapture through the nerves of the delighted Countesses. Some of the liveried postilions took away the horses ; two, by order of Count Polkiegraez, took the front seat. The Honourable Teddy, with—oh, joy!—the Countess Florizan beside him, drove off the race-course gently, in the wake of the gorgeous yellow coach drawn by the famous team of blacks.

"We are going to play what you English call a 'practical joke' on Prince Stepan," said the Countess, smiles playing over the scarlet lips that the young cavalryman longed to kiss. "All Magyars are passionately fond of them, and my father has made up his mind. Drive slowly at first, please, keeping the yellow coach in view along this mountain road before us, until we reach the place where the road winds between a deep gorge on the one side and a precipice on the other ; then put on speed and overtake the Prince. When we have had our little joke, drive on as rapidly as you can. Once we are among the Uzuoi Hills, we are ~~safe~~ <sup>safe</sup>"

a fortress ; nobody has ever yet dared to seek my father there.”

And as the beautiful Countess spoke she calmly drew from one of the deep pockets of her sable mantle a handsome silver-mounted six-shooter, clicked open the breech in a business-like way, shut it, and smiled at the surprised look in the tail of the Honourable Edward’s eye. “ I have another weapon in the other pocket,” she said gaily. “ We Magyar ladies have a habit of going armed. Now—now ! Drive on and overtake the yellow coach.”

The “ Flyaway ” leapt forward. In an instant it was abreast of the yellow coach with the team of straining blacks.

“ Prince Stepan Kutzokzi,” cried the polite voice of Polkiegracz, “ pull up, or I shall fire !”

The smart-looking man on the box of the yellow coach whipped up for all reply. A revolver cracked, and the near leader of the team pitched over. The coach, which narrowly escaped an upset, slewed down the road, almost upon the haunches of the plunging wheelers. Had not the astonished Edward reversed in time, the flying “ Flyaway ” would have come to grief.

“ I say——!” he gasped.

Something cold pressed against his temple. The muzzle of a six-shooter inspired the refreshing chill, and the Countess Florizan, whose white hand gripped the butt of the weapon, advised the Honourable Edward, in accents grown strangely stern, to say nothing at all. He thought it better not to disoblige the lady. Other six-shooters, wielded by the two servants on the front seat, and by the Countess Ilona, covered the Prince and his infuriated companions, as the polite Polkiegracz got down and relieved them of their winnings. Then——

“ Forwards and full speed !” cried the dark-eyed Florizan in the ear of the bewildered Edward. The “ Flyaway ”

wormed past the tangled team and the prostrate leader, then leapt like a steel greyhound up the mountain road.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Your trip has done you good, my dear fellow," said the Colonel; "you're looking bronzed and fit. Not that I ever had a fancy for touring in Eastern Europe myself. Too many smells, fleas, and brigands, at least to suit my taste! Were at Polzvar, I understand, in February. At the Polzvar Races a Hungarian chap I met at the last Levée —Prince Stepan Kutzokzi—was held up by a local brigand called Polka—something—and relieved of his Turf winnings to the tune of a hundred thousand florins, he tells me."

"It was only fifty thousand," said the Honourable Edward incautiously, "and two other men on the Prince's coach had something like twenty thousand between them."

"Ah, you heard of the affair, then," said the Chief. "Polka-what's-his-name has an automobile to facilitate business, the Prince tells me. Go-ahead kind of brigand, what?—and his sister and his daughter—devilishly handsome women, both, according to the Prince, are his accomplices. The daughter shot the near leader of the Prince's team, or Kutzokzi might have had a chance to get 'home, sweet home' with the little bit he'd pulled off. Confounded luck, I call it! Magnificent creature, he says—I mean the girl that shot the horse—and wears jewels fit for an Empress. Handsome sapphire ring you're wearing, by the way—never saw a finer stone, to my remembrance. Must have cost you a pretty penny."

"It—it—was a present from a—from a friend," stammered the Honourable Edward.

"Wish I had a friend who had acquired a habit of givin' away little trinkets of that description," said the Chief facetiously. "Well, you'll have an opportunity of meetin' the Prince. He dines at mess to-night."

He did, but the Honourable Edward was prevented, by

circumstances over which he had absolute control, from figuring as one of the magnate's numerous hosts. An attack of feverish chill, caught in Eastern Europe, was the ostensible excuse.

So the Prince missed the shock of meeting at an English regiment's mess-table the chauffeur of Polkiegracz's motor-car ; and a very callow subaltern, who had never seen a live brigand, much less aided him to plunder a Prince and party of seventy thousand florins, or kissed his daughter good-bye at the close of a brief but incandescent flirtation, carried on during three days of semi-captivity—"devilishly pleasant captivity!" the Colonel would have called it—in her rocky mountain home,—proposed the customary loyal toast, whilst the Honourable Edward dined at his quarters, and looked sentimentally at his sapphire ring.

"I ought to send it back to her, I believe!" he said, and kissed it. "Unless I am a bigger fool than I imagined myself to be, I won't take it, myself, as I promised to. For you're a charming creature, Florizan, and I'm frightful nuts on you ; but you're a trifle too ready with the revolver for me!"

## XXIII

### THE TRIBUTE OF OFFA

#### I

I SHALL take it for granted that every frequenter of the London auction-rooms is acquainted with Pringold's Galleries ; not a hundred miles from Piccadilly Circus, a little nearer to Pall Mall ; on the left-hand side, looking west, of a short street ; a cul-de-sac of unblemished respectability, barricaded at the upper end by an old-fashioned family hotel.

Although I am not to be numbered among rich men, I seldom miss a sale at Pringold's Galleries, because a bachelor of moderate means can find a good deal of entertainment in watching other people spend what he has not to spare. Therefore, one raw morning in February, when I groped my way to Pringold's through a monochromatic fog, and, butting up against one of the dropsical plaster pillars of its Palladian façade, knew that I had got there, I passed in by the swing-doors with a pleasant sense of being at home, and having a right to tread the muddy red carpet of the corridor. Other swing-doors admitted me to the room where Pringold's periodical sales take place. Here the electric-lights struggled gamely with the fog, and the vacant desk of the auctioneer and his clerk presided over a multitude of empty chairs, arranged as one sees them in a church or an American theatre, with an aisle down the middle, and gangways across the room-end and along either side-wall. The great white-faced clock over the central door of three, all

leading to the private offices of the Messrs. Pringold, indicated half-past twelve ; and according to the published announcements the sale ought to have begun a quarter of an hour previously.

" You've got it all to yourself, sir !" said Pringold's giant porter, a vast man of thews, famous for his way of marching down the middle aisle, carrying a piece of Dresden, a diamond necklace, or a Stradivarius violin, a tray of coins, an enamelled snuffbox, or an Old Master in a ponderous frame, at the full stretch of a pair of enormously long arms. " I mean," he added, " you and the little lot near the stove."

The huge attendant glanced at the large white-faced clock, and passed out between the swing-doors leading to the corridor as I approached the group of six persons gathered in the neighbourhood of the anthracite heater, whose tall funnel climbed the wall and went out at a hole under the foggy skylight. There were two ladies and four men. One of the ladies was pale and young, dressed in mourning that sunshine might have shown to be shabby. She occupied one of the inhospitable Windsor chairs on the right of the stove, and next her sat the second lady, who was of obvious middle-age and determined aspect. Even by the inferior light it was possible to read emancipation in her expression ; and the gleam of gold-mounted spectacles added to the sharpness of the eyes that looked through them. She was well-dressed for walking in muddy country lanes, and the boots extended beyond the verge of her shortish tweed skirts were of large size and sensible stoutness. Also her umbrella was the kind with which it would have been possible to hit a market-mad bullock over the head, upon occasion, without spoiling the umbrella. Near her sat a keen-faced, bright-eyed, silken-haired, well-dressed gentleman, whom I instantly recognized as a citizen of the United States. And in quaint contrast to the American, with his

air of quiet resourcefulness and cosmopolitan experience, was his neighbour, an individual with a bulky springless figure and beady grey eyes set near together in a square red face, with little disassociated tufts of flaxen whisker on it. He wore a suit of ginger-coloured cloth, as stiff as a suit of mediæval armour, and while the village tailor had given him plenty of material in the sleeves, the euffs of which engulfed his freckled hands to their squat nail-tips, the rustic artist had abbreviated the trouser-legs ; so that when the wearer bent himself into the sitting posture and hitched the garments up, his drab yarn sock-tops were revealed, and the edges of his mustard-coloured underwear. A huge warty stick with a crook at one end and an iron dibble at the other, and a brown bowler hat of great height and excessive hardness, completed his general impression—the dominant note of it being natural fertilizer, so that no intelligent person could doubt of his being a farmer.

On the left side of the anthracite stove lounged a young and handsome man whom I had often seen before at Pringold's ; an exquisite in a sable-lined and collared overcoat, thrown open so as to reveal the ultimate perfection of morning dress. His cane possessed a handle of carved jade, his tie-pin was a ruby in the matrix, from the short slender chain of gold and platinum that horizontally crossed his dainty vest there hung a Greek eoin, the enormous value of which, as a collector, I was able to appraise. . . . Between persons of like tastes and pursuits there is an acquired freemasonry. The wearer of the costly sable-lined coat was subtly conscious that his Greek coin was a greater guarantee of wealth, culture, and refinement in my eyes than the sumptuous garment which might have adorned any brainless Italian opera-tenor or successful operator on the Stock Exchange. He courteously removed his hat from the chair that neighboured his own, and as with a word of thanks I took it :

"Now our half-circle is complete," he said, in a well-bred, pleasant voice, with a certain suggestion of languor in it, a note of depression perhaps attributable to ill-health, or overmuch luxury.

He looked, not at me, but the person on my right hand. A broad-shouldered, hollow-chested, weak-eyed man of the superior mechanic-class. I put him down as a compositor until I noticed that his fingers were burned and stained with acids, and then I was inclined to hesitate between a jeweller's workman or a photographer's hack. But the suppleness and delicacy of the stained hands decided me upon his following the more artistic calling; and with this the man's head, too, was more in keeping, being of spirited and handsome outline, with an upright growth of dark curly hair, and a generous breadth between the brown eyes he turned towards us, that bespoke the possession of the sense of proportion and form. Ideality showed in the rounded arch of the sallow temples, and something not far removed from intellectuality was in the high and forceful expression of the man's features. But his hopeless expression, underfed appearance and worn garments proved that, however well-equipped by Nature for the fray, he had brought little else but wounds out of the battle of Life. A hacking cough bowed his thin shoulders and convulsed his hollow chest from time to time. After this, with an apologetic look, the man would expectorate into an old red silk handkerchief, and I inwardly was grateful for its colour, as concealing stains that white would have revealed too well. During one of these paroxysms the young Sybarite who wore the Greek coin upon his watch-chain suddenly addressed me with the tone and manner of a cultured gentleman.

"I wonder why our neighbour with the cough comes here? Surely a coin-sale can possess no attractions for him? What interest can *he* possibly take in the Tribute of Offa?"

"You refer," I said stupidly, for I knew quite well what the speaker meant, "to the hoard of Mercian coins recently found at Glattendon Dyke in the valley of the Upper Trent, and which are to be dispersed under the Pringold hammer in this room to-day?"

I had touched a numismaniac in the most sensitive spot. In the pale cheeks of the languid young dandy burned two red patches, and his voice had quite an energetic ring, as he retorted :

"The hoard will not be dispersed, sir, for I am going to buy it!"

Before I could say anything in return, a singularly penetrating voice broke into the conversation :

"Sir," said the American gentleman, bending towards the luxurious young man across the irreproachable top-hat, which, in deference to the presence of the ladies, he nursed upon his knee, "Sir, may I be permitted to congratulate you? Unless my experience of the ways of auction-rooms and auction-roomers, both British and American, is not at fault, an interesting and exciting afternoon is before you. I have observed," the speaker lifted his neatly-gloved hand to his silky moustache, perhaps to control the irrepressible smile that played hide-and-seek in the fine lines about his grave eyes and well-modelled lips, "that ultimate profit is not the aim of the private collector of curios and antiques, but what is humorously termed sport. I wish you good sport to-day, sir, most sincerely."

"The bidding will be spirited, I have no reason to doubt, even though a limited number of bidders may be present," rejoined the other; "but I have carried prizes out of many such fields, and am fairly well accustomed to bear the burden and heat of the scramble." As he spoke he drew a tiny vinaigrette of pale antique gold filagree-work, studded with brilliants, from his vest-pocket, and opening it, inhaled with palpitating nostrils its reviving aroma.

"This is one of my trophies, by the way, and also by the way, it cost me eighteen hundred."

"Of your pounds," asked the American coolly, "or our dollars?"

"Eighteen hundred pounds!" said the languid owner. He daintily sniffed at the vinaigrette, and placed it in the extended hand of the American, adding, "It belonged to the murdered Princess de Lamballe, and was given by her to the ill-fated Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, during their last meeting in her narrow green-papered cell at the Feuillans, before the martyr-Princess was hurried to the prison of La Foree, and the royal family immured in the Temple. The unfounded suggestion of its possibly containing poison, furnished Madame Degas, the coarse woman who acted as the Queen's keeper, with an excuse for depriving the anointed victim of the coveted bauble. It was purchased from Madame Degas by a person who represented himself as an English dealer in *objets d'art*, and was really an emissary of M. Gougenot, the King's *maître d'hôtel*. Among this gentleman's most cherished treasures, after his death, was found the diamond vinaigrette with the scrawled receipt of Madame Degas, to which was appended a memorandum in the handwriting of the deceased official. I need not detail the process by which this hallowed trinket passed from possessor to possessor until it found a home in the cabinet of the Duke of Benbridge, at whose decease, in 1904, it was sold at Dixie's with the bulk of the deceased nobleman's collection." The speaker drew a long breath and exhaled it in a sigh, murmuring: "Shall I ever forget that sale! All the leading connoisseurs, all the great dealers, all the world of Society and Art, jammed in one vast comprehensive crush. It was tremendous!"

"I recall the event," returned the American pleasantly, "having been one of the sardines present. There was some tall bidding!"

"Sensational," agreed the elegant young man.

"The first day's clean-up panned out at ninety-four thousand," said the American, "as a result of the frisky activities of the dealers."

"Wynklin won the great prize," said the luxurious amateur, with reminiscent rapture. "His duel with Mr. Cupid Bose over that Régence marqueterie commode which he carried off with a bid of three thousand guineas, was——"

"A-stonishing!" said the American. "The climax of screeching finance! The hall-mark on the enhanced standard of valoos!"

"Moreen and Blant had set their hearts upon this," continued the young man in sables, gazing with shining eyes at his treasured vinaigrette. "Hoggspice wanted it. The bidding started at sixty guineas, and much to the chagrin of two persons I have named, I became the owner of this priceless relie for the trifling sum of eighteen hundred pounds."

"Thanks to the graceful and retiring modesty which induced the other gentlemen to back out!" remarked the American gentleman. There was not a spark of malice in his expression, or anything but the blandest cheerfulness, and yet the luxurious young man glanced at him suspiciously.

"I gather," he remarked, with an accent of *hauteur*, "that in your opinion I have been swindled? You impugn the authenticity of this priceless and genuine relic of the martyred Austrian?"

The American held up his well-gloved hands in polite depreciation.

"Sir," he said, "upon the contrary! I was taught in early youth, sir, that Santa Claus came down the chimney on Christmas Eve with the parcels I had seen my parents smuggle home from the store. And such early exercises impart elasticity in after-life to the muscles of the mental

swallowing-apparatus, if I may so term it. Sir, I may describe myself as the possessor of a twenty-eight horse-power credulity. I have been able to believe, thanks to my excellent parents, that Mr. Amos P. Baker exposed the nefarious public dealings of the Standard Glucose Trust for the benefit of his fellow-creatures ; and that the millionaire owners of sumptuous studios on Madison Avenue put up red-velvet swings and line the walls with looking-glass for the amusement of their lawful wives and spinster relatives. And one of the things I believe is, that the Princesse de Lamballe paid a considerable deal less for that smelling-flagon than you have done !”

And he bowed respectfully to the young connoisseur.

“ Nor do I regret it !” said the other. “ You referred just now to the enhanced standard of values. What could enhance the preciousness of a mere jewelled toy more wonderfully than the touch of Marie Antoinette ?”

“ I unite with you in appreciation of the lady,” returned the American, “ though, judging by her portraits, her profile was too highly stropped, if I may so express it, for the American ideal of beauty. But what I appreciate more is the refreshing trustfulness of the British nature, and the pleasing glamour of reality which gentlemen like Mr. Cupid Bose, or Mr. Hoggspice, or Messrs. Moreen and Blant are able to cast around their gambols on the daisied sod of the London auction-room. By arrangement the auctioneer has his handsome percentage on each sale. What, if I may presume to ask, is the graft that Mr. Cupid Bose and the rest divide between themselves when they have washed off their war-paint and left off pretending to be rivals ?”

“ Graft,” echoed the luxurious owner of the diamond-set-vinaigrette. “ And what, may I ask, is graft ?”

“ Consult an Amurrican dictionary,” said the previous speaker, “ and you will find that to graft is not only to mend shoes, but to extract the golden juice, if I may put it

poetically, from the human orange. We have, in my great and glorious country, many varieties of graft, but, ostentatious as we are about other advantages, we do not boast in this line! We have police graft ; graft-boodling in the Boards, Syndicates, and Committees ; theatrical graft, graft smash-ups on our railways, Insurance graft, Trust graft, Company graft, and religious grafters of many denominations. We have wire-tapping graft, Wall-street graft, Bank Fund and Charitable Association graft; coal, lumber, oil, steel, and grain graft, gas graft, and tax graft. But perhaps the simplest and most elemental kind o' graft, the one that has most of the perfume of hawthorn-buds and the genuine fragrance of the cowslip about it, is auction-room graft ! And when we cross the ocean and impress with our Leather-Trust-supplied, Union-labour-sewn boot-soles the dear old soil of Britain, to find it blooming there is a thing that wets the eye, and causes the bosom, I allow, to do some considerable heaving!"

The speaker paused. The working mechanic with the hollow chest and stained hands and the heavy cough, had, like myself, listened to him attentively. Like myself, he now looked towards the delicate dilettante to see how the odd American mixture of sly humour, bitter sarcasm, deadly contempt and placid philosophy, affected him. And a strange, mysterious smile hovered about his pale lips. The other persons constituting the group about the stove had been attracted by the discussion, and expressed interest in several ways. The pale young lady whom I now saw to be very pretty, if too colourless and fragile for actual beauty, had fixed large, light hazel eyes upon the eloquent features of the American's face, and those eyes throbbed with such vitality of feeling as is, for all our protested belief in the power of the human eye to convey shades of emotion, most rare. The elderly lady wore a frown such as might pucker the brows of disappointment, and kept a

firm grip of the solid wooden handle of her umbrella with one large, strong, gloved hand, the other being occupied with a yellow-paper-covered sale-catalogue such as each of us possessed. It may be that she disapproved of the American for being so very American indeed ; or that his outspokenness had confirmed certain painful doubts of her own. And the agricultural-looking personage sat very upright, with his coarse hands upon his heavy knees, which were set very wide apart, and his piggish little grey eyes were palpably distended with something akin to dismay. They followed the careless, supple movement of the young patrician's hand as he restored the Queen's vinaigrette to its place in an inner pocket, and seemed to express respectful wonder that a man to whom it had just been plainly suggested that he had been robbed, should take the thing so coolly.

"The idea of such a roguish conspiracy among those men who trade in the old and precious handiwork of ancient artists and craftsmen," said the handsome young man after a moment's pause, "is not too pleasant ; and by your leave"—he bowed coldly to the American—"I much prefer not to dwell upon it ! That I have paid a large price for a relic which I regard as priceless I cannot regret ; the documents I hold sufficiently prove its genuineness, and when I die—for I shall not part with it whilst living—it will justify my expenditure by fetching a price that will be piquantly sensational. Perhaps my spiritual essence will be hovering in a dusty shaft of sunshine near the auctioneer's desk as the hammer falls !" He passed his white fingers through the waves of dark hair that sat upon a forehead not wide enough for genius but high enough for thought ; and the pale young lady sighed a little, perhaps at the thought of the death of one so well calculated to make a woman's life happy.

"Sir," returned the American, "as a member of the Episcopalian Church of Amurrica, I can but devoutly hope

that your spiritual essence will be more agreeably employed. A connection of mine, Mr. Amos J. Sculpin of N'York, of whom you may have heard in connection with the co-lossal combination known as the Chewing-Gum Trust, of which he is head boss and director"—the luxuriously appointed young gentleman bowed slightly—"cherishes, in a specially-designed compartment of a cabinet designed in Kentucky rock-crystal for the reception of such royal reliques as the salts-bottle you have just placed in your vest-pocket, an article exactly similar, possessing the same history, and authenticated by identical documents; which was privately sold to him in 1904 as having formed part of the lamented Duke of Benbridge's collection. I lament him, sir; not because I grieve for his death! but because if he had lived and continued to freeze to his curios, the fellow-countryman I mentioned would still be in possession of the wad he has been artistically relieved of!"

"Sir, I regret that Mr. Sculpin should have fallen a victim to the trick of a lying tradesman," said the luxurious young man with a dignity that suited him extremely, "even while I congratulate myself upon being the fortunate possessor of the genuine vinaigrette of Queen Marie Antoinette!"

The American struggled for utterance a moment, and I believe I saw tears well into his eyes. Then, rising, he bent forward and, extending his hand to the luxurious young man, he said warmly:

"Of your kind, sir, is the Kingdom of Heaven. Oblige me by shaking that!"

The luxurious young man obliged with more courtesy than warmth, and turning to me as though to change the tenor of the conversation, remarked how strange it was that none of the regular *habitués* of Pringold's Gallery had as yet appeared.

"For the sale will be of a very interesting character," he

said, "as in addition to the recently-discovered hoard of silver coins catalogued as the 'Tribute of Offa,' I observe that an electrum stater of Lydia will come under Pringold's hammer."

"And do you intend to be a bidder for this numismatic rarity also?" I inquired, I hope in a tone that did not betray a vulgar curiosity.

The pale and graceful wearer of the costly sable-lined overcoat smiled sadly and slightly shook his handsome head.

"I cannot but question the genuineness of the coin," he remarked, "which represents the earliest form of money known, dating from 700 B.C., and composed of a metal formed of the natural mixture of gold and silver obtained by washing the sands of the classic stream of Pactolus."

"In which King Midas is said to have laved away the inconvenient gift of the Golden Touch," I added, not regretting the opportunity of showing that I also possessed a modest fund of learning.

"I surmise," said the American, "that before his Majesty King Midas lavated the inconvenience right away, he took the precaution of handling his nickel money, gilt jewellery, and plated ware? Otherwise, I should be tempted to regard the first three letters of the potentate's Christian name as supererogatory!"

The elegant wearer of the sumptuous coat elevated his finely-pencilled eyebrows as though the utterance of the New Yorker appeared to him to be lacking in good taste, and said, turning to me :

"Only one true coin of the kind I have described has as yet been found. And here it is!" He lifted the coin that hung suspended from his delicate watch-chain with a beautifully-manicured right thumb and forefinger, and held it out for my inspection. "It is mounted in a setting from which it can be detached at will. As you observe,"

he added, and detached it, placing the numismatic treasure in my reverent palm—. “I was fortunately travelling in Asia Minor at the time of its discovery; and when I purchased it the soil of Lydia was encrusted upon its beauty. Judge for yourself if it was not a treasure-trove ?”

“I discern upon the obverse the royal symbol of the sun-lord Attys, and the ear of corn, denoting the worship of Demeter, upon the reverse,” I said.

“What an exquisite hue has the electrum,” said the elegant young man. “How vulgar mere gold seems beside that subtle *nuance* of yellow, pale as the harvest moon ! I purchased the treasure-trove from a Greek merchant of Smyrna, and thought myself fortunate when he asked no more than seven thousand drachmas, a sum quite considerably under three hundred pounds !”

The Lydian coin vanished from my palm, whence it had been dexterously whipped by the agile fingers of the American. Beyond a slightly ironical elevation of the eyebrows, its owner manifested no annoyance, but remarked in a singularly level tone :

“Possibly, sir, you recognize the specimen as an inferior one, or even as a forged reproduction of a coin now in the cabinet of your distinguished connection, Mr. Amos J. Scalping——”

“Sculpin,” corrected the unmoved American.

“Of New York ?” added the elegantly attired young man.

“Sir, be reassured upon the point,” said the connection of Mr. Amos J. Sculpin, blandly. “Sir, I do not ! Amos is a variety of fools, sir, but not the mammoth kind.” He leaned towards me, extending his narrow palm, in which lay the electrum stater. I took the coin, but it slipped from my hold and fell upon the worn red felt that carpeted the Gallery. I uttered a slight exclamation of dismay, echoed by the American. Simultaneously we dived for the coin, but the shabby man who occupied the chair

between us was quicker than we. He picked up the pale yellow, shining semi-oval, and polishing it carefully upon the straggling end of a worn and frayed blue silk neck-handkerchief, palpably a bit of woman's gear taken into masculine use, he civilly restored it to its owner, saying, in the hollow, toneless voice of pulmonary disease, and with a strange, fleeting gleam of something very like mockery in his faded negatives of eyes :

"Here is your valuable possession, sir," and in a moment the gravity of his thin face was shattered, and he broke into a fit of the discordant, braying laughter that pains the utterer no less than the listener. "Ha, ha, ha!" he barked. "Ha, ha! . . . Oh, Lord! Really, gentlemen and ladies, I ask your pardon, but it got the better of me. . . . Oh, dear!"

He got the better of it, beating on his knees and gulping down the spasmodic cachinnations that rose in his throat. And as he dried his weeping eyes with the frayed ends of the torn blue neckerchief I saw the glance of the American exploring him with quiet persistency. Then the lean, narrow-palmed hand visited a waistcoat-pocket and eame out again with an English sovereign in it.

"I'll give you this five-dollar bit if you'll answer one question and answer it straight! Is it a deal?" asked the cool, cutting voice.

## II

We all hung upon the reply. The man was shabby and poor ; his eyes devoured the gleaming golden bait with a desperate hunger in them, and yet he hesitated to clinch the bargain with the calm, keen-eyed speculator. The mingling of shame and desire in his face was strange and pitiful to see, as he faltered :

"It depends, sir, upon what the question is?"

"I'll tell you right away," said the American. "I want

to know why you laffed when you picked up that gentleman's coin ? Take the money and tell. Smart, now !"

I heard a little quick-caught, feminine breath as the shabby mechanic, crimson to the hair, stretched out a hand to take the sovereign. I glanced at the pale young lady, whose face was full of pity. The angel who stands behind the demon-tempted gambler in the German woodcut, and silently pleads with the reckless one not to close the awful, unhallowed bargain of a soul for earthly gain, wears such an expression of anxious solicitude, and might have given such a sigh. The angel of the print, being a Teutonic angel, has a full, fleshy face, whereas this girl's features looked as if carved out of worn ivory, and her young cheeks showed hollows instead of curves. And her strange, changeful, light hazel eyes reveal violet depths of sorrow behind the grey mists of unshed tears.

I do not know quite why I did it, but I took out a sovereign of my own, and with a challenging glance at the American, towards whom until that moment I had not felt the slightest animosity, I said to the shabby man :

" *I'll give you this sovereign not to answer !*"

As the man gasped with surprise and lifted his hollow eyes incredulously to mine, the American whipped out two sovereigns more, and added them to the first.

" I'll see you, sir," he said, employing the well-worn shibboleth of the poker-player, " and raise you ! Fifteen dollars," he added, addressing the shabby mechanic, " to say why you laffed just now !"

I am not rich. I had had one flash of approval from those mysterious hazel eyes, and would have gladly earned another. But I had only some small silver with me in addition to my sovereign. I endeavoured to convey this explanation in the deprecating glance I directed towards the pale young lady. I think she bowed her head, very slightly. I have never been quite sure ; but that she under-

stood I was certain then. And as I looked at her the sadness of her face changed to lovely joy, as a mountain river-pool that has lain lustreless under a cloudy sky will leap into dazzling brilliance when a sudden ray of sunshine strikes it. I heard the unmistakable crackling of a bank-note, and the soft, well-bred voice of the owner of the diamond vinaigrette and the Lydian coin saying :

“ Ten pounds to you to keep your secret !”

“ Turning, I beheld another change in the face of the pallid mechanic. He looked like the Laughing Faun.

“ Sir ! sir !” . . . he stammered. But the American was busily extracting what he would have called his wad from an inner breast-pocket, and his alert features were alight with pleasurable excitement as he moistened his thumb and whipped another note from the roll.

“ Twenty to tell !” he bid. Wall Street must have known that brisk business-manner. The face of the farmer in tailor-made armour was now purple, his little pig-eyes were popping from his head. The determined-looking elderly lady had barely relaxed her frown ; the girl, with the new light in her eyes, the rose-flush that had blossomed on her cheeks and the gleam of white even teeth between her pink, parted lips, was wonderfully transformed. I could have blessed the languid young plutocrat who was responsible for the miracle, even while I was sensible of a tang of bitterness because it had not been wrought by me. It was very strange that the warm spirit of human sympathy illuminating the young woman’s features should have made itself felt by its object without one exchange of glance or spoken word. As the American confidently crackled the bait under his victim’s nose, the tempted man lifted his dark, cloudy, troubled eyes to her, saying appealingly :

“ Miss, what am I to do ?”

“ Take the money, friend !” said the American briskly.

"Do not take the money, sir," said the girl, "if it will cost you your self-respect!"

In what a voice of melody she spoke the words. Prin-gold's auction-room is large and lofty, but that utterance woke its echoes and made the crystal drops of the old-fashioned glass chandelier, hanging from its central dome, vibrate with a faint tinkling response. And yet the young woman had spoken in an undertone, without effort or gesture. "How she must sing!" I thought, and wrongly. For the pearl beyond price, the voice of voices, is most divine in speech. Your golden-throated prima-donna is a mere mechanical nightingale beside the owner of the heavenly organ that breathes the mysterious music heard ere birth, and thrills the listener with rapture that is almost pain. Looking upon the speaker, I now observed by the noble sweep of the shoulders, and the fine poise of her head upon a straight and columnar throat, that her person was far less insignificant than had appeared to my previous observation. To be struck at once by the outward beauty of a person is a very common experience; to behold it kindle in the face and burgeon from the form in which you had not previously suspected the treasure lay concealed, is to know the exultation of the discoverer of a new world. This young woman was like a hawk-moth, whose dead-leaf and bark-grey tinting can so assimilate with the bough on which the insect rests that the eye ignores its presence; until . . . a quiver of the folded wings reveals the glorious jewelling of their hidden side. To be handsome at all times is a gift of the fairies; to be beautiful in the eyes that of all you would wish to please,—to be lovely whenever dear love is to be gained—could any boon come more direct from Heaven to a daughter of Eve?

The mechanic with the acid-stained hands wrung them together upon receiving the young lady's answer; and yet gave her a look of gratitude such as a dog might bestow upon the master who has cut out a splinter or a thorn. His

eyes reverted to the Ameriean's twenty pounds, but he subdued the longing in them, and mastered the desire to take.

"I venture to echo the lady, though less melodiously," said the luxurious young man ; "and since we have played this little comedy nearly through, let me bring down the curtain. Here are fifty pounds." He extended a little roll of notes to the tempted man. "Accept the money ; do with it as you will, and laugh or be melancholy as you prefer, without explaining the why or the wherefore to impertinent inquirers !"

"Dear me !" exclaimed the elderly lady involuntarily, and with a slight shiver. "How very rude !"

"Marm," said the American with a smile, "your sympathy is grateful, but the saline globules of its native Chesapeake Bay do not roll off the spry and frolicsome canvas-back quicker than disparaging remarks are accustomed to roll off me. 'I kin be shot, but not wilted !' as a friend of mine, known on the N'York Petroleum Exchange as 'Iscariot Junior' and 'Ananias II.' is accustomed to remark. And the resentment of my friend in the pelt-lined overall adds—such is our fallen human nature!—a kind of flavour to the game. It inspires me to offer the gentleman with the expensive laff a hundred pounds English for his reason in letting it loose just now, and here's the money !"

"Let him take it or leave it," said the handsome young man with a contemptuous shrug. "Beyond the fifty pounds I have offered I will not go !"

It was curious to see how the thirst for the hundred pounds parched the lips of the pale mechanic. He wetted them with his tongue before he could speak, and then his utterance was addressed to the pale young lady.

"My wife is dying," he said hoarsely ; "my child is ill. We are in debt to our landlord. I am without work : and a hundred pounds would pay our debts and keep us for nigh a year !"

"I am not your judge," said the person he despairingly addressed. "Do as you will !"

The words ended in a dying cadence, and a sigh that seemed to stir the air about us as the broad feathers of an angel's folding wings might have done. And the lids of the speaker dropped, shutting out all radiance ; her beauty vanished ; her form seemed to shrink in size and grow vague in outline until she sat beside the commonplace spinster lady as a being of no special individuality, and no apparent charm. There was a crisp and crackling sound as the American's notes were transferred to the stained palm of the worker, and the handsome young man in the sable-lined coat thrust the rejected fifty back into his pocket. And then :

"Am I to explain privately to you why I laughed, or before these ladies and gentlemen ?" the bought man asked, with a hollow inflection like a groan. His stained left hand was pressed against his heart, as though to make sure of the reality of the precious money that might save wife and child, or to still the remorseful anguish of its throbbing.

"You shall tell us all, I guess !" said his purchaser, with cool mercilessness, after satisfying himself, by a glance about the auction-room, that Messrs. Pringold's herculean porter had not returned.

"The Lydian coin I picked up just now, and which this gentleman says he bought for three hundred pounds of a Smyrna merchant," said the pale mechanic, with a heavy sigh, "was manufactured by myself. I swear it by the Hand that made me !"

The handsome young man flushed suddenly to the temples. He clenched his covered right hand until the white knuckles burst through the soft tan glove, with an effect as of teeth in a brown, laughing face.

Then he spoke, quite calmly, but with a dangerous spark in his fine black eyes : "Tell me the merchant's name ?"

"Demetrius Ionides," said the pale mechanic, gulping down something that worked in his throat, and the expression in the face of the handsome young man assured me that the poor wretch had spoken truth. "Ionides has worked

off most of the archaic stuff that me and one other man—whose name's no business of yours!—have made in the last fifteen years, for Mark Lucassa, the West End medal- and antique coin-dealer. Lucassa's travellers range half the world in seach of rare coins, he'll tell you, and he pays big prices for perfect examples, and sells clever duplicates of them for the price of diamonds to rich collectors; and does it so cleverly that each fool-buyer thinks himself the only man who owns the genuine thing—that's locked up in Lucassa's private strong-room all the while! Lord! what a collection he has! Not one doubtful or imperfect coin among 'em; and not one that hasn't been duplicated and sold a hundred times over, and a hundred times to that, thanks to the poor devils who sweat day and night in his workshops under the West End!"

"And you are, or were, one of these perspiring citizens?" said the American drily. "You might not admire to hear it, maybe, if I gave you a shorter name!"

"You can't call us smashers!" asserted the other with a flash of defiance. "Antique coins aren't currency, and so the trade calls the faking of 'em by a prettier title. Talk of Rings and Trusts! Don't Lucassa and half-a-dozen others boom the market as they choose? Don't they publish the books of reference collectors consult, tell 'em what to buy and what to pass over—ah!—and where to dig, maybe, for stuff themselves laid down?" The pale mechanic paused to cough. "A hint of mine about that led, in a manner, to my losing my job at Lucassa's, if the true reason wasn't that I've made as many silver hemiektons of Athens, hectas of Cyzicas in Mydia, and tetradrachmas of Syracuse, Alexander the Great, and Alexander the Lesser, as he's likely to want for a good while. But all the same—rot him!—he'd best have kept me on... he'd best have!" He pinched the rough cloth of his shabby coat over where the bank-notes lay hidden, and nodded as they gave forth a crackling sound. "You've made me

independent of the Old Man's cursed shops"—he nodded at the American—"that he kicked me out of only for a word!"

"The tale the church bells tolled," observed the American, "was :

' If he had took more care,  
He'd not have gone in there !'

and I take it, substituting 'out of' for 'in,' your case is much the same as that of the citizen in the elm-tree overcoat."

But the humour of the allusion was lost upon the late drudge of the great coin-dealer. "This is how it was!" he said, with evident effort. "There's a Welshman in Lucassa's place has got a pretty knack at turning out sceattas and stycas and other silver pennies of the Saxon Heptarchy. At it day and night for a year past, he's been. Pretty rough they run, till you get to the Mercian pennies of King Offa, and they're handsome enough. . . ."

There was a stir or susurration of awakened interest among the group of three persons sitting on the right side of the stove. The farmer-like man tilted backwards suddenly in his chair; the sternly-composed elderly lady loosened her grip of her umbrella to rub her nose and adjust her spectacles; the large, translucent hazel eyes of the pale young lady flashed violet. She drew her breath inwards with a little gasping sound before she lowered her long-fringed eyelids and sat as calmly as before.

"The coins of Offa, A.D. 757, are the most interesting and valuable, as you say," responded the owner of the forged coin of Lydia. "The heads of those I have been shown by Messrs. Pringold are executed with spirit and finish; the designs on the reverses are wonderfully various. It is supposed that the King's residence at Rome, in the Pontificate of Adrian, accounts for this superiority——"

"And Morgan Davis's being a clever chap!" said the late *employé* of Messrs. Lucassa, with a sardonic grin. "Two thousand rare ones he made, and made 'em rarely.

'Offa Rex Merciorum' inscribed as proper as you please. And forty silver ones of Cynethryth, the Queen, 'Cyn. Regina' on the reverses; and one rare one without the dot after the name, and one in pale Welsh gold—priceless if it had have been genuine, and like to fetch a thousand pounds even now, handled by Lucassa! And, though I'd seen the game played scores o' times before, I must have my joke. 'There's going to be a find soon, in the country!' I says to Morgan Davis. 'Kent, perhaps, or up Lancashire way, if we're choice about a good locality!' And Lucassa was behind me, curse him! and grinned like a fox. He handed me my week's wages and my quarter's overtime that night, and told me to go to the devil! And he's shut every door in the trade against me, since then, every door! . . . And who was I to quarrel with my bread and cheese? What was it to me, my sick child, and my sick wife, if they buried and found a hundred pretended treasures such as the Tribute of Offa?—that's to be sold in this place for the biggest sum the biggest fool will give for it this day! . . ."

"Man!" cried the handsome wearer of the sable-lined coat, almost fiercely, "do you mean to imply that the rogue you name is responsible for the whole parcel of coins that are advertised in this catalogue"—he struck the yellow leaflet angrily upon his knee—"as having been dug up at Glattendon Dyke, in the Valley of the Upper Trent, enclosed in a bronze cauldron? . . ."

"And if he do, he be a loiar!" came suddenly and loudly out of the large mouth that unexpectedly opened in the square red face of the agriculturalist in the armour-plate of the village-tailor. "Yees, he be! for I seed that owd boocket digged up myseln, full o' they tin vard'n's, I did so; an' my Bible oath I'll take on it!"

"And I, sir, as step-sister upon the mother's side of the clerical gentleman of whose glebe, Glattendon Dyke, situated about thirty miles from the town of Lincoln, upon a branch-line, forms part," said the determined-looking elderly lady,

"am prepared to testify to the genuine discovery of the coins in the ancient sacrificial vessel to which Farmer Cowdray has referred as a bucket!" She cast upon the farmer a look of scorn, which glanced aside from his dull consciousness as a quill-pen shaft might glance from the surface of a metal tea-tray. "And here is another person who was actually present when the hoard was brought to light!" She waved a plump gloved hand in the direction of the pale young lady, towards whom, until this moment, her manner had given no indication of knowledge or relationship. "My step-niece, Miss Cynethryth Lowerne!"

"It is true!" said the sweet, vibrating voice of the girl, as she returned the slight, courteous bow of the owner of the Lydian coin and the diamond vinaigrette. "And my aunt and I are here to-day on behalf of my father, the Reverend Eadwald Lowerne, who, as owner of the land, claims proprietorial rights in the treasure-trove, and, being an invalid, was unable to bear the strain of the journey to London."

"An' thee and Miss Maughan might ha' stayed behind, yees, thee might so, Miss Cynether!" said Farmer Cowdray, purpling, "for all Vicar be like to git out o' that copper boocket be your pains. He won't rascal me out o' my rights, an' he'd best know it! Don't I rent Glattenden Dyke o' he, at twinty pounds the yeer for th' field an' bit o' bogland, an' pay my quarters reggerly as th' settlin' day comes round? And odds dickens! what comes out o' th' earth, beant it mine by roights? O' coorse it be!" He brought one colossal hand down upon his solid knee with a smack that made the Vicar's step-sister jump in her chair. "My roights—an' I be agooin' to ha' 'em!" And the ponderous hand banged down again.

"Your determination would do you credit, sir," said the elegant wearer of the sable-lined coat, "if your pretensions to the ownership of the hoard were more solidly founded. As a landlord, I know somewhat of the rights of an owner of the soil, and a morning call upon the nearest solicitor would

have convinced you of your error, and spared you your journey."

"A laa'yer!" roared the owner of the crimson face. "A villian paid to swear black be white, lookin' true in the face! I'll ha' no trook wi' laa'yers. Thieves all, they be, every man Jack!"

"Well, in that case, friend," remarked the American slyly, "I guess you would have found yourself in company!"

"Miss Cynether," said the farmer, "be that there seratty lookin', weasel-chopped feller theer maakin' out as I'm a thief?"

"The gentleman does not quite mean that, Mr. Cowdray," said the girl gently. "But he thinks that you were mistaken in thinking you possessed the right to sell those persons who came to you in March, permission to excavate a trench along the Dyke and carry away whatever they might discover. My father had never allowed anyone to dig there; he had long suspected the existence of Saxon remains at Glattendon, but had not the means to pay for labour, and was therefore compelled to leave the place untouched. And you know," the sweet voice faltered, "that the shock of hearing what you had done without his permission nearly killed him! He has never been the same man since the seizure, and may never completely recover, Dr. Blissett says!"

"I be sorry for the Vicar," said Farmer Cowdray, doggedly, "but a man's roights be a man's roights." His little pig's eyes blinked as he shook his wooden head: evidently the heart under the village tailor's rhinoceros-hide panoply was less hard than it appeared. "My nine years' lease o' Glattendon Dyke mead an' marsh woort oop till the March quarter. I soold them chaps the right to dig on the 'leventh, kippin' a fifth share in the profits o' whatever they mought find. What they foond were mine to sell, an' I'll give oop my rights for no man livin'!"

"Young lady," said the pale-faced worker in metals, re-

moving the ominous red handkerchief which, in the endeavour to suppress a fresh attack of coughing, he had held pressed against his convulsed and ghastly lips, and addressing himself timidly to the Vicar's daughter, "I can only testify to what I know. The copper cauldron the coins were contained in when dug up, that is supposed to be a sacrificial vessel, is an article of real antiquity. It is of ancient British workmanship, purchased by Mr. Lucassa for the purpose it was used for—the old fox makes many a good investment of the kind. As to the coins, if I must say the word—they are rank forgeries! Don't interrupt me!" he cried with sudden passion, as the American would have spoken. "I can prove what I say, by the Lord! and that before ten minutes are over. Let this gentleman," he pointed to the handsome wearer of the sable-lined motor-coat—"let this gentleman, who is known to Messrs. Pringold as a wealthy collector, send in the commissionaire to the manager's office with his card and the request that the gems of the find," he laughed hollowly, "may be brought out here by the man for a moment's private inspection. The rare silver penny of Cynethryth the Queen without the dot after the name," he grinned, "and the one in pale Welsh gold, that some fool collector will be ready to sell his soul for—"

"We'll have them out!" cried the person addressed, springing to his feet and snatching a daintily-enamelled gold card-case from his vest-pocket. "It shall be the final test!"

"I won't look at the coins, not I! You may blindfold me as tight as you please before the porter brings 'em in," cried the haggard metal-worker faintly. "But I'll tell you what marks to look for—you, sir," he repeated, pointedly addressing the graceful young dandy, "or the gentleman who offered me the sovereign, or the young lady—God bless her for her pity on a suffering wretch like me! And if you don't find 'em, set where they were by Morgan Davis that he might know his own handiwork again if ever he

should come across it, I'll hand you"—his fever-bright eyes blazed from their sunken settings angrily upon the American—"I'll hand you back the money you have paid me, you—you cold-blooded buyer of a fellow-creature's self-respect!"

"It's a deal!" uttered the New Yorker, quite ungalled by the acrid hatred and contempt of the metal-worker's tone. He rose, touched the electric bell-button marked 'Porter' that jutted from the wall near the row of hooks whence the railway-guides depended, and as the uniformed giant re-entered from the outer corridor, the handsome young man, beckoning, handed him a half-sovereign and a pencilled visiting-card, the name engraved on which was evidently familiar to Colossus, for he did not even glance at it.

"Oblige me by conveying that message to Mr. Henry Pringold," said the owner of the card, "and tell him, if he will gratify the desire of the sender, the courtesy will be profoundly appreciated."

He turned to Miss Lowerne as the giant commissionaire vanished through the left-hand door of the three private entrances communicating with Messrs. Pringold's inner offices.

"Do I understand," he asked, bending courteously in the direction of the Vicar's sweet-voiced daughter, "that your father really had previous knowledge of a concealed hoard in Glattenden Dyke before the excavation of the mass of coins whose genuineness we are now to question?"

"In the north angle of the Dyke, under the Dole Loaf, as they call a curiously-shaped boulder," assented Miss Lowerne, "according to an ancient plan or chart written in monkish Latin upon parchment which has been preserved in our family for ages, a treasure is said to lie hidden."

"Od drabbit it, Miss Cynether! th' ow'd parchment too'ald th' wrong stoary!" put in Farmer Cowdray, blinking his little pig's eyes. "'Twas the sooth end o' th' Dyke where they foreigners digged an' foond th' boocket o'

coounters, an' filled up th' hole agen, as they gev' me their solemn promise to do. Not a shool they struck in ground at th' north angle, as I've toald ye times upo' times. . . .”

The re-entrance of Colossus, bearing at the full stretch of two immensely lengthy arms a wooden box of the smallest dimensions, diverted the attention of the listeners and brought the speaker's broad Doric periods to a close.

“ Pause, I beg, madam, and you, gentlemen !” cried the luxuriously attired young gentleman as the American, the Vicar's step-sister, and myself—I own it with regret—jostled each other in the attempt to gain first glimpse of the contents of the extremely small receptacle carried by the excessively large porter. “ Restrain your natural euriosity, I entreat ! Let the first glimpse of the contents of yonder box—deciding the genuineness of the coins, or revealing them as forgeries,—be Miss Lowerne's !”

We drew back, as at an entreating glance from the haggard worker in metals, and an encouraging smile from the handsome young man, Miss Lowerne advanced towards the immovable Colossus. Then the Ameriean held up his hand, arresting the young lady's steps midway.

“ A moment, ladies and gentlemen, with your permission !” he said. “ I guess it will not interfere with the validity of the arrangements if our versatile acquaintance, Mr. Barker—whose coff I do allow has supplied me with the name !—will swivel his intelligent countenance around this way, and keep it fixed while I put a question to the out-sized gentleman in the gilt-buttoned frock, whom, not having the privilege of knowing his name, I shall presume to address as Mr. Midgett. Maybe Mr. Midgett will oblige by telling the assembled company whether he possesses any previous acquaintance with Mr. Barker ? Also, whether the gentlemen who run these auction-saloons have had any truck with Mr. Barker at any time to his knowledge ? And, finally, whether Mr. Barker has, since the collection of coins poetically known as the Tribute of Offa

have been in the keeping of Messrs. Pringold, enjoyed any opportunity of getting a good look at them ? Now, Mr. Midgett !”

The giant commissionaire looked carefully at the shabbily-dressed metal-worker, shook his head, and said in a small mild voice that contrasted whimsically with his great height and brawny mass of muscle :

“ Never saw the man here before, and I’ve been on duty here without a day off, except Sundays, since I came back from South Africa with the Reserve !”

“ Euchred !” said the American, with a pleasant smile. “ And now, Mr. Barker, wade in. I will not further interrupt the picnic.”

“ I ask the young lady to take this magnifying-glass,” said the pale metal-worker with a trembling voice, as he drew a cheap instrument from his coat-pocket, “ and examine the silver penny of Queen Cynethryth of Mercia, and read out the inscription on the reverse.”

“ It is ‘Cyn Regina,’ ” said Miss Lowerne, after an instant devoted to inspection of the coin.

“ There is no dot after ‘Cyn,’ I think ?” said the haggard man, stifling a cough.

“ No,” replied the Vicar’s daughter.

“ You have already told us——” the handsome young man was beginning, when the late *employé* of Lucassa stopped him with an entreating gesture.

“ There is no dot *after* ‘Cyn,’ but just before the ‘C’ there is one, so slight as to be invisible without the magnifier ?”

“ It is as you say !” answered Miss Lowerne, after an instant’s pause.

“ I have not finished yet,” said the haggard man, throwing a glance of contemptuous triumph in the direction of the American. “ Take up the penny of pale Welsh gold. Examine—not the head of the Queen on the obverse, but the punched name of the moneyer in irregular letters on the reverse. How does it read to you ?”

'Stamped in irregular letters within a border of dots,' answered Miss Lowerne, 'I decipher 'SIVAD. ROM.''

"And what is that, read backwards, but 'Mor. Davis'?" cried the consumptive man, shaking his thin clenched hand at the American in an ecstacy of defiance. "Look for yourselves and tell me I'm lying, if you can!"

The luxurious young man uttered an exclamation and taking the coin eagerly from the hand of the Vicar's daughter, subjected it to a brief scrutiny, and burst into a peal of not untuneful laughter.

"Absolutely," he cried. "I forgive the clever scoundrel who perpetrated the forgery! 'SIVAD. ROM.' is 'MOR. DAVIS,' beyond a doubt. And the wiseacres have had it that the moneyer of Offa was Sivadius, a Roman, lent to Offa by Pope Adrian as a mark of favour gained during the Mercian King's residence in Rome. Well, I am convinced! I shall not bid for Mr. Davis's handiwork, meritorious as the execution certainly is. So, sir, supposing you feel inclined to battle for the possession of the Tribute of Offa, one formidable rival is removed from your path!"

"Sir," replied the American, who had inspected the damning token while the young man was speaking, and now handed it to me with a polite smile: "I should have surmised that the gold penny would have made a pretty pendant to the Lydian coin you wear upon your watch-chain, but you may bet your whole team with the yalla dog under the wagon that if you are unlikely to bid for it, I am considerably more so! Maybe this gentleman ambitionises to become the proud possessor of Mr. Davis's masterpiece?" he continued, adding as I smilingly shook my head, replacing the gold penny in the box held by Colossus; "I perceive that Mr. Barker has removed himself with his wad, as silently as a snail slips over a cabbage-leaf on a dewy morning."

It was true. I had observed the shabby man, after the exchange of a brief sentence or two with Miss Lowerne, pull his soft felt hat down over his eyes, button his shabby coat

tightly, and hurry out of Pringold's. The swing-doors banged-to behind him, as the huge commissionaire re-entered the left-hand door leading to the auctioneer's private offices, conveying the *chef d'œuvre* of the gifted Morgan Davis out of our sight, possibly not for ever, I reflected, even as the musical voice of Miss Lowerne replied to the American :

"The unhappy man has gone to comfort his sick wife and feed his hungry children, sir, with the money that is honestly his. Do you decline to credit your fellow-creature with the possession even of the commonest virtues because poverty compelled him to follow a dishonest trade ? Have you really such absolute disbelief in human nature as you continually imply ?"

The imperturbable American smiled pleasantly, and made the young lady a not ungraceful bow.

"As a member of the N'York Stock Exchange," he said, in quite duleet accents, "I may be sceptical—some!—as regards human nature. But I guess you will have to forgive me for saying—you have in your own person convinced me, Miss Lowerne—that angels do occasionally visit this little old planet ! And as angels, to be angels at all, must be devoid of what my fellow-countrymen would call 'push' in business,—in the interests of your poppa, whose family secret you—with a seraphic confidence in the honesty of our fallen human nature that I could not but admire even while I regretted it!—gave away in the hearing of five complete strangers and this good gentleman"—his gloved hand waved in the direction of Farmer Cowdray—"may I be permitted to suggest that you take the very next cars back to the parish of Glattenden Dyke in Lincolnshire, scare up your garden help, and dig under that rock your Latin parchment tells of—before that wheezing pulmonary who has just waltzed, or any other person"—his sharp eye glittered suspiciously about the room—"any other person with a taste for Mercian coins, strikes ile before you?"

The handsome young man turned impetuously to Miss Lowerne.

"This gentleman gives you excellent advice, madam. The vessel of forgeries was planted by the rogue Lucassa at the south end of the Dyke—the real treasure-trove lies yet, perhaps, at the north angle. Let me beg—let me urgently implore you—to travel home by the next train, charter honest labourers, and dig under the Dole Loaf without delay! Pay no heed to the expense! I guarantee it twenty times over, upon condition of being permitted to share in the first examination of any coins you may find, and purchase them at a fair price, for my collection!" His pale face glowed, his eyes beamed with the excitement of the ardent amateur as he snatched an A.B.C. Railway time-table from where it hung, with other reference-books for public use, upon the wall, and turned the leaves with eager fingers, as he continued : "I had intended to bid for this agglomeration of forged coins to-day : to gain that silver penny of Cynethryth without the dot, and the gold one—the invention of an inspired scoundrel—I was ready to sacrifice the moiety of a fortune which is esteemed unusually large. Permit me to introduce myself as Bernard Aldobrand, ladies, the sole remaining and bachelor representative of the great financial house of Aldobrand, the pillar which has supported thrones and enabled Powers to take the field in War. My auto-brougham waits outside. Give me the privilege of taking you to King's Cross Station, after first offering you luncheon at Prince's Restaurant ; there will be ample time if you and your aunt will consent so to honour me ? Thanks !—thanks ! Permit me, madam ; allow me, Miss Lowerne !"

And in a whirlwind of pleasurable excitement the enthusiastic Mr. Aldobrand led both the ladies out of Pringold's auction-rooms. The swing-doors dully banged-to behind the trio, darkness and chill seemed to settle back upon the place, robbed of the sweet presence of the Vicar's gentle

daughter. Shivering, I put on my hat and resumed my overcoat, and as the New Yorker briskly buttoned his, glancing at Farmer Cowdray, who remained immovable on his chair. . . .

"I be gooin to steay," said this stolid specimen of a yeoman, "an' see what they silver fardins fetch i' the market. As to Miss Cynether an' the Vicar's parchmint, that be all my hoi! They chaps what paid me for th' roight to dig i' the Dyke foond all there be to foind: an' if they gets a loomp o' money, be danged but I'll ha' my share o' it!"

"Old Hickory is great on small wheels," said the American, as the door under the white-faced clock opened and Pringold trotted out, followed by his inseparable clerk. He added, as we quitted the Galleries together, stemming quite a rush of entering visitors, armed with the well-known yellow catalogues, and eager for the fray: "But whether that sweet young English girl discovers the genuine Tribute of Offa under the Dole Loaf, or whether she does not, I guess she has to-day found something that every properly-constituted unmarried young lady, English or Amurrican, regards as not only valooable, but indispensable to her success and happiness in life!"

"You mean . . . ?" I began, remembering the ardent glances the handsome Aldobrand had cast upon the Vicar's daughter, and the shy confidence that had beamed in her answering look.

"Sir, you have hit it! I mean, sir," said the American, "precisely that! He added, as we parted, "In case I should prove wrong I shall allow to have added the mammoth variety of fool to the collection of Amos J. Sculpin!"

Mr. Amos J. Sculpin, I must own, has proved a true prophet. No Mercian coins were found beneath the Dole Loaf, but the marriage of the young millionaire, Bernard Aldobrand, to Cynethryth Lowerne was announced in the *Times* of yesterday.

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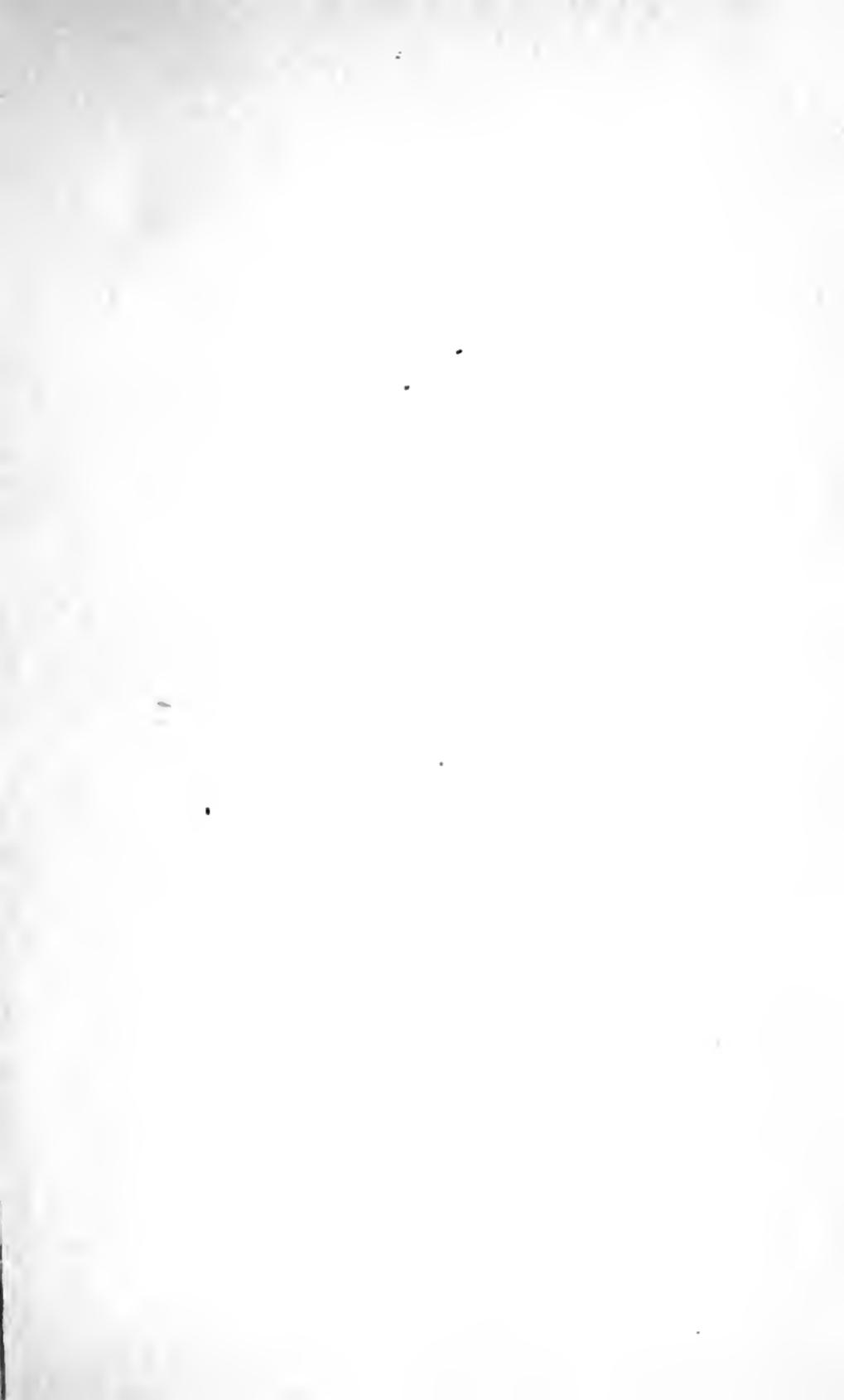
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